# 半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN

VOLUME 4

## THE MAN WHO ALTERED THE RIVER'S FLOW

*By* KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

# 半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN

*Lifelong Friends, with the Same Dreams,*
*Striving to Grow into a Rising River.*


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# 半蔵の門

# THE MAN WHO ALTERED THE RIVER'S FLOW

*by* KAZUO KOIKE
& GOSEKI KOJIMA

## VOLUME 4

*"I can't see the tomorrow . . .*
*of my lord . . . anymore."*

Using Hanzō's method of reducing rice kernels to the size of sesame seeds, Motoyasu (Ieyasu) successfully delivers new provisions to Odaka Castle, which represents the most forward point of Imagawa's army. Immediately thereafter, leading Imagawa's advance unit, Motoyasu storms Oda's Fort of Marune and succeeds in defeating Sakuma Morishige. However, he feels uneasy upon hearing that the main force, led by Yoshimoto, left Sunpu and is about to reach Dengakuhazama, where they may be at risk. Thus, Motoyasu rushes Hanzō over to Dengakuhazama in his attempt to save Yoshimoto...

# 半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN

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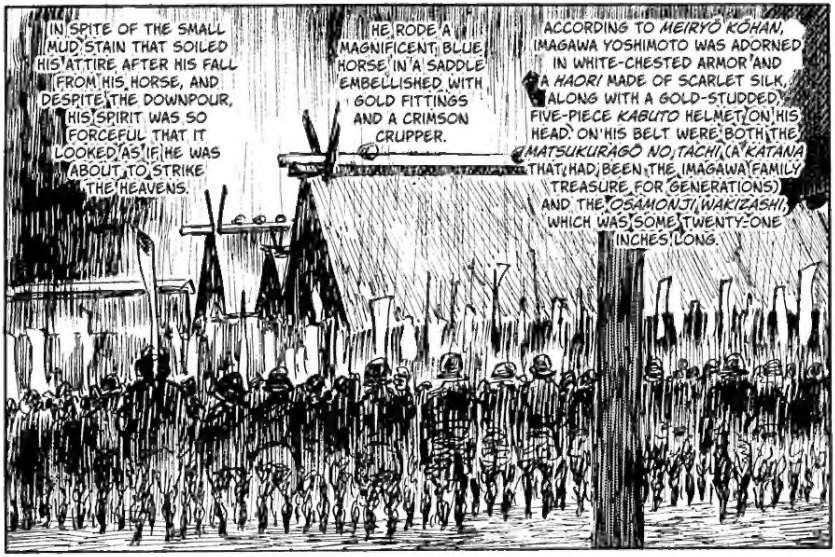
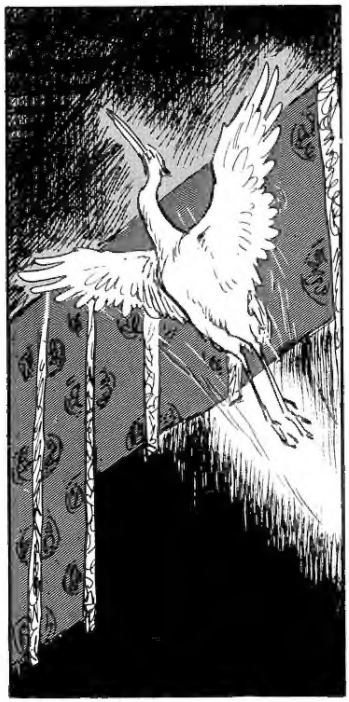
# Chapter On Relinquishing Death

## No. 2: Hard Crossroad on the Plain, Part 2


IN SPITE OF THE SMALL MUD STAIN THAT SOILED HIS ATTIRE AFTER HIS FALL FROM HIS HORSE, AND DESPITE THE DOWNPOUR, HIS SPIRIT WAS SO FORCEFUL THAT IT LOOKED AS IF HE WAS ABOUT TO STRIKE THE HEAVENS.
HE RODE A MAGNIFICENT BLUE HORSE IN A SADDLE EMBELLISHED WITH GOLD FITTINGS AND A CRIMSON CRUPPER.
ACCORDING TO *MEIRYŌ KŌHAN*, IMAGAWA YOSHIMOTO WAS ADORNED IN WHITE-CHESTED ARMOR AND A *HAORI* MADE OF SCARLET SILK, ALONG WITH A GOLD-STUDDED FIVE-PIECE *KABUTO* HELMET. ON HIS HEAD. ON HIS BELT WERE BOTH THE *MATSUKURAGO NO TACHI*, (A *KATANA* THAT HAD BEEN THE IMAGAWA FAMILY TREASURE FOR GENERATIONS) AND THE *OSAMONJI WAKIZASHI*, WHICH WAS SOME TWENTY-ONE INCHES LONG.



WE FACE A GREAT MULTITUDE WITH OUR HUMBLE ARMY. IT MAKES US LOOK LIKE A PRAYING MANTIS TRYING TO STOP A WHEEL. STILL, WE SHALL SUMMON THE VALOR OF A MAN WHO CAN FIGHT A THOUSAND ENEMIES AT ONCE. WE SHALL BUILD A MOUNTAIN AND A RIVER WITH THE CORPSES AND THE BLOOD OF THE IMAGAWA ARMY.
SO I BESEECH THEE THY DIVINE PROTECTION TO LEAD US TO VICTORY.

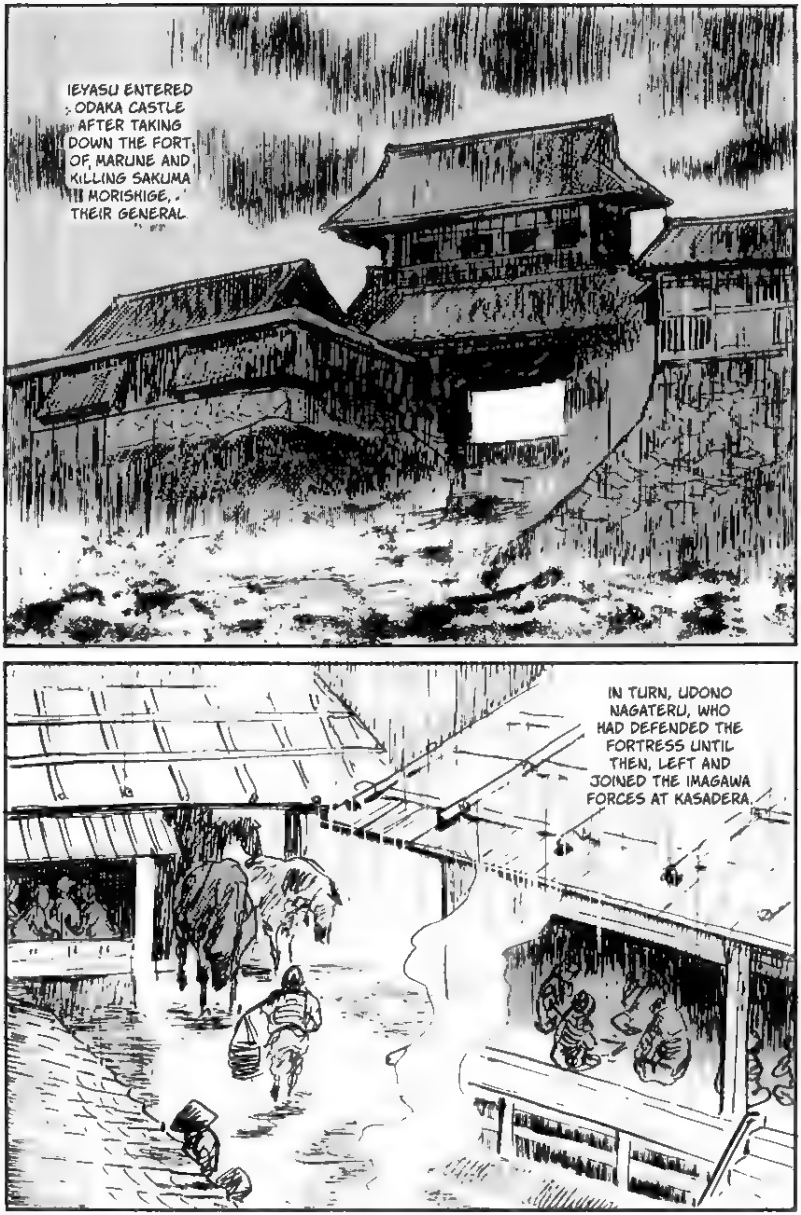
THE GODS WILL PROTECT US!
TH... THAT'S AN AUSPICIOUS AUGURY.

うわ
UWAAAAH
わ
WAAAH
HEAVENS, BEHOLD! WE WILL TRAMPLE THE IMAGAWA ARMY UNDER OUR BOOTS!
GO! MOVE OUT!

I ENTRUST YOU WITH THREE HUNDRED MEN. TAKE THEM TO NARUMI.
YES, SIR.
SASA NARIMASA! MASATSUGU!
YOU'RE MY VASSAL EVEN AFTER DEATH. STAY WITH ME FOREVER!
IF YOU COME IN CONTACT WITH THE ENEMY, LET THE TOWNSFOLK FLEE BEFORE LAUNCHING AN ATTACK.
YOU MUST MAKE IT LOOK AS IF OUR MAIN FORCE IS HEADING THAT WAY.
GATHER TOWNSFOLK, HAVE THEM CARRY BAMBOO POLES, AND MAKE IT SEEM AS IF THREE THOUSAND MEN ARE ON THE MARCH.
YES, SIR.
YES, SIR!

WE'LL TAKE THE MAIN ROAD FROM IDOTA TO YAMAZAKI.
LISTEN UP! SINCE THE TIDE IS FULL, WE MUST AVOID THE BEACHES.
MOVE OUT!

DIVINE PUNISHMENT WILL FALL UPON YOU, BALDY RAT!
HA HA HA HA HA HA.
IF IT DOES AFTER WE WIN THE WAR, I'D BE HAPPY TO FACE ANY.
IINOO SADAMUNE... I COMMEND YOU FOR HOLDING OUT THIS LONG.
WASHIZU, TOO, HAS FALLEN...


IEYASU ENTERED ODAKA CASTLE AFTER TAKING DOWN THE FORT OF MARUNE AND KILLING SAKUMA MORISHIGE, THEIR GENERAL.
IN TURN, UDONO NAGATERU, WHO HAD DEFENDED THE FORTRESS UNTIL THEN, LEFT AND JOINED THE IMAGAWA FORCES AT KASADERA.

IT LOOKED AS IF EVERYTHING HAD WORKED OUT AS IEYASU PLANNED...

BAKED RICE BALLS ARE HARD INDEED. MY JAWS ARE TIRED ALREADY.

GULP
GULP
MUNCH
MUNCH

MASACHIKA... MASATADA...
WHAT MY ARMY HAS SACRIFICED IS ENORMOUS.
SHIGETOSHI... KŌRIKI MASASHIGE... AND THE OTHERS. WE WON'T DINE WITH THEM EVER AGAIN IN THIS WORLD.
EVEN THOUGH WE WON, IT IS PAINFUL. HOW HUMILIATING AND SAD IT MUST FEEL TO DIE IN DEFEAT.
HOW WRETCHED IT FEELS... AFTER A BATTLE...

LIVE OR DIE, IT'S WRETCHED EITHER WAY... INDEED.
I'VE JUST RETURNED.
MILORD.
AH, GOOD.
HIRAMATSU MUNETSUGU IS HERE, MY LORD.
HE IMMEDIATELY LOOKED AT THE HEAD I DELIVERED AND APPEARED EXTREMELY PLEASED.
TELL ME ABOUT OYAKATASAMA.

AND THE MAIN FORCE?
HE SUGGESTED THAT YOU LET THE MEN AND THE HORSES REST UNTIL HE SENDS HIS NEXT ORDER...
HMM.
THEY SHOULD BE NEAR DENGAKUHAZAMA BY NOW, I BELIEVE.
YES. HE SAID HE'D LEAVE KUTSUKAKE CASTLE, PASS THROUGH OKEHAZAMA AND COME THIS WAY.
BESIDES, THE VIEW IS OBSCURED IN THAT REGION. THEY CALL IT *HAZAMA* FOR A REASON.
MUNCH
MUNCH
THE STRENGTH OF THE MAIN FORCE... WITH ONLY FIVE THOUSAND MEN UNDER MIURA YOSHINARI, IT'S RATHER THIN.
DENGA-KUHAZAMA, HUH?
MUNCH

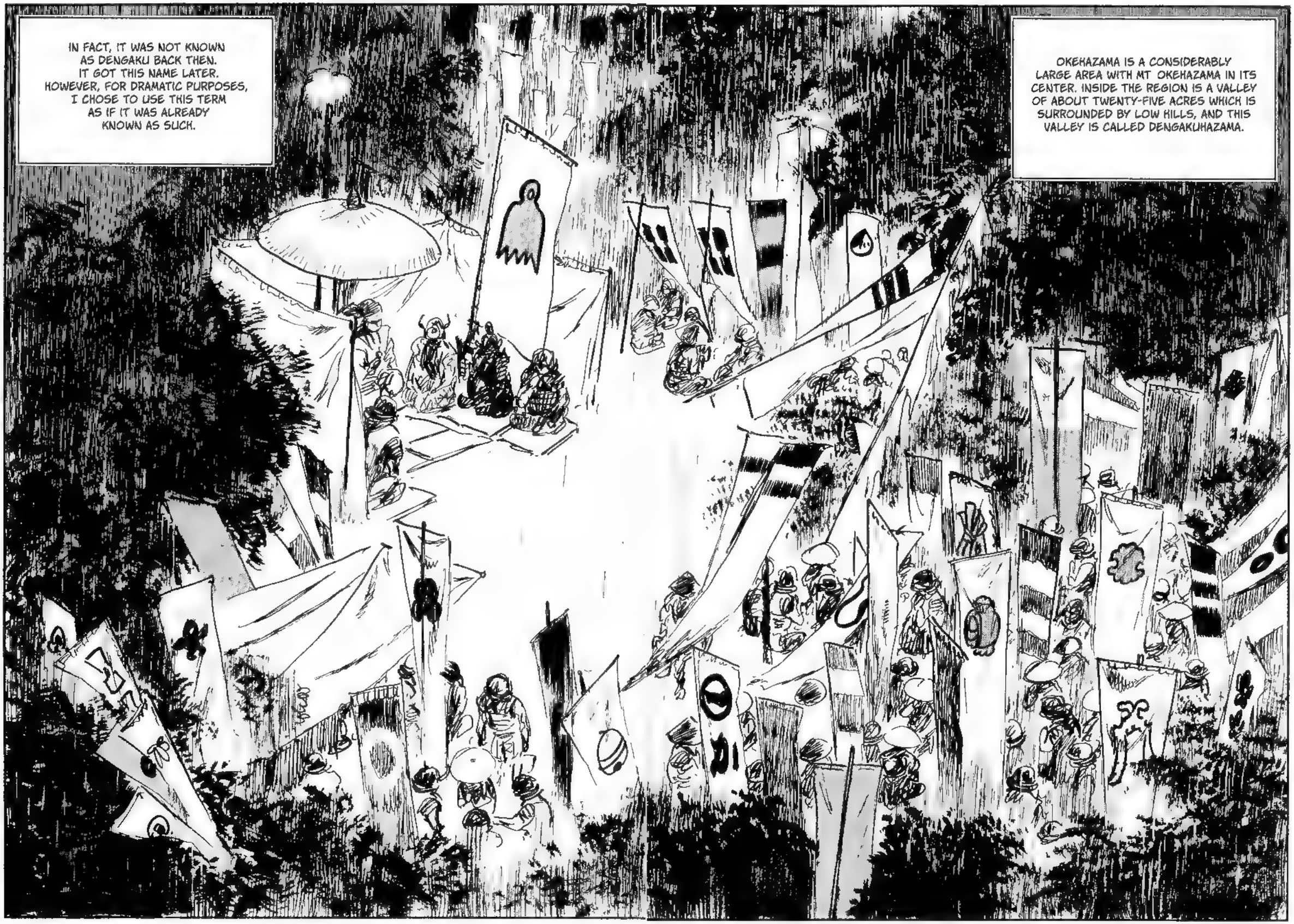
HE WOULDN'T DREAM OF TAKING A BREAK THERE... NO...
IF THEY'RE JUST PASSING THROUGH, NOTHING COULD GO WRONG.
I GUESS IT'S ALL RIGHT.
HANZŌ!!
BUT... IF THEY GET THERE AROUND NOON...
WHEN MEN TAKE A BREAK, THEY LOWER THEIR GUARDS. NOT ONLY THAT, *HAZAMA* IS A BLIND SPOT. AND WITH THE RAIN ON TOP OF THAT.
FLY TO DENGA-KUHAZAMA!
YES, SIR.

...PASSED THROUGH ZENSHŌJI TEMPLE, AND WOULD BE WAITING SOMEWHERE AROUND NAKAJIMA FORT TO FACE THE IMAGAWA ARMY. IF SO, TAKING A BREAK AT DENGAKUHAZAMA IS TOO DANGEROUS.
IF KIPPŌSHI-*DONO* PREFERRED TO FIGHT OUT IN THE OPEN, HE WOULD HAVE LEFT YAMAZAKI, HEADED FOR THE FORT OF TANGE...
TELL OYAKATASAMA THAT I SAID SO!!
...I'D IMMEDIATELY LEAVE NAKAJIMA FORT, TAKE THE EASTERN ROUTE, HEAD SOUTH FROM AIHARA, HIDE SOMEWHERE AROUND TAISHIGANE JUST NORTH OF DENGAKUHAZAMA, AND WAIT FOR A CHANCE TO STRIKE OYAKATASAMA BY SURPRISE.
IF I WERE IN KIPPŌSHI-*DONO*'S POSITION, THE MOMENT I LEARNED OYAKATASAMA WAS TAKING A BREAK AT DENGAKUHAZAMA...

YES, SIR!
I HOPE I'M WRONG.

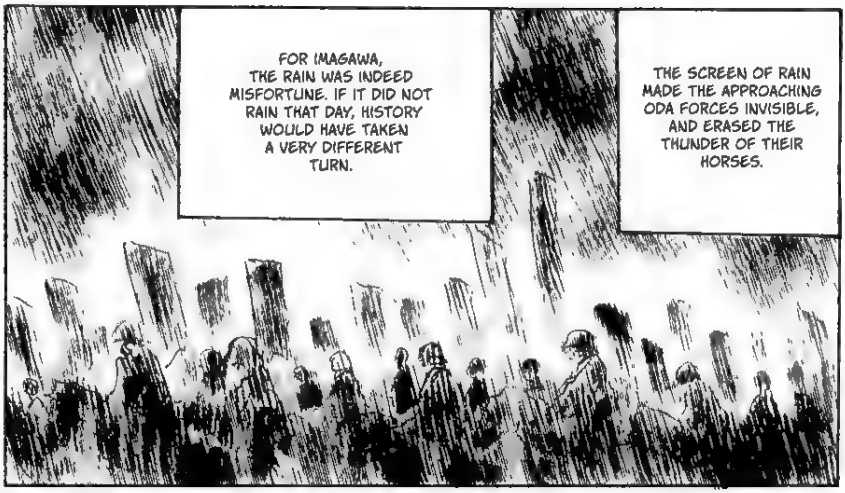
TRUM
TRUM
TRUM
TRUM
TRUM
STAB!

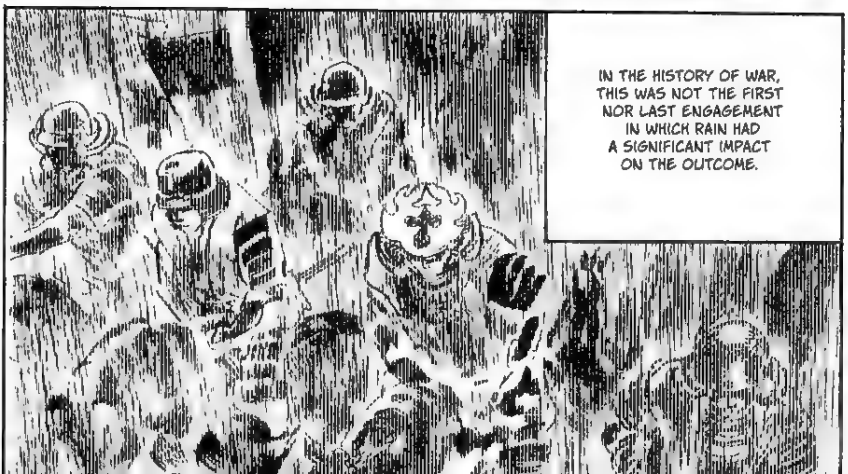
NOT ONLY THAT, HE BROUGHT MEN FROM ZENSHŌJI TEMPLE TANGE, AND THE NAKAJIMA FORT INCREASING HIS FORCE TO WELL OVER THREE THOUSAND

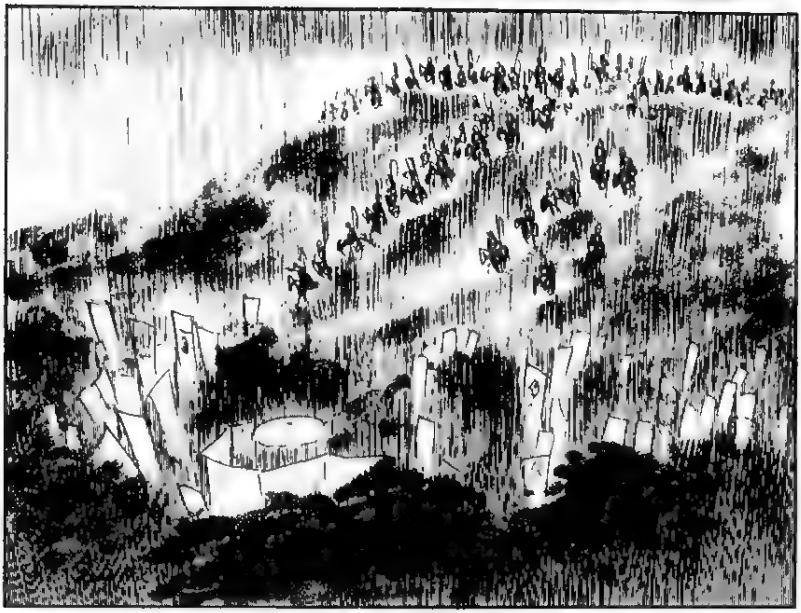

IN FACT, IT WAS NOT KNOWN AS DENGAKU BACK THEN. IT GOT THIS NAME LATER. HOWEVER, FOR DRAMATIC PURPOSES, I CHOSE TO USE THIS TERM AS IF IT WAS ALREADY KNOWN AS SUCH.
OKEHAZAMA IS A CONSIDERABLY LARGE AREA WITH MT. OKEHAZAMA IN ITS CENTER. INSIDE THE REGION IS A VALLEY OF ABOUT TWENTY-FIVE ACRES WHICH IS SURROUNDED BY LOW HILLS, AND THIS VALLEY IS CALLED DENGAKUHAZAMA.

BAKED RICE BALLS ARE HARD INDEED. MY JAWS ARE TIRED ALREADY.

IT POURED UPON THEM EQUALLY. IT WAS SIMPLY AN ACT OF FATE, THAT DIVIDED LIGHT AND DARKNESS.
IT WASN'T RAIN. IT WAS A WATERFALL. THE POWERFUL DOWNPOUR DREW A CURTAIN BETWEEN IMAGAWA AND ODA.


FOR IMAGAWA, THE RAIN WAS INDEED MISFORTUNE. IF IT DID NOT RAIN THAT DAY, HISTORY WOULD HAVE TAKEN A VERY DIFFERENT TURN.
THE SCREEN OF RAIN MADE THE APPROACHING ODA FORCES INVISIBLE, AND ERASED THE THUNDER OF THEIR HORSES.


IN THE HISTORY OF WAR, THIS WAS NOT THE FIRST NOR LAST ENGAGEMENT IN WHICH RAIN HAD A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON THE OUTCOME.



IT'S...
IT'S TOO LATE,
TSUKUMO.

OUR ENEMY IS IMAGAWA YOSHIMOTO-- THAT SINGLE MAN ALONE!
CHARGE!!
WHAT'S THAT NOISE?
WHAT IS IT?
TRUM
TRUM
TRUM
TRUM
TRUM

WHA... WHAT?!
THE FORCES OF ODA!
THE... THE FORCES OF ODA!
NO... IT CAN'T BE.
ドドド

KAAA...
KAAA...
HAA...

AN HONOR TO MEET YOU!
I AM KIHARA JINNAI.
MUHOO!

YOU...
YOU ARE IMAGAWA YOSHIMOTO-KŌ...
I BELIEVE.
I AM HATTORI KOHEITA!!

I AM...
MŌRI
SHINSUKE!!

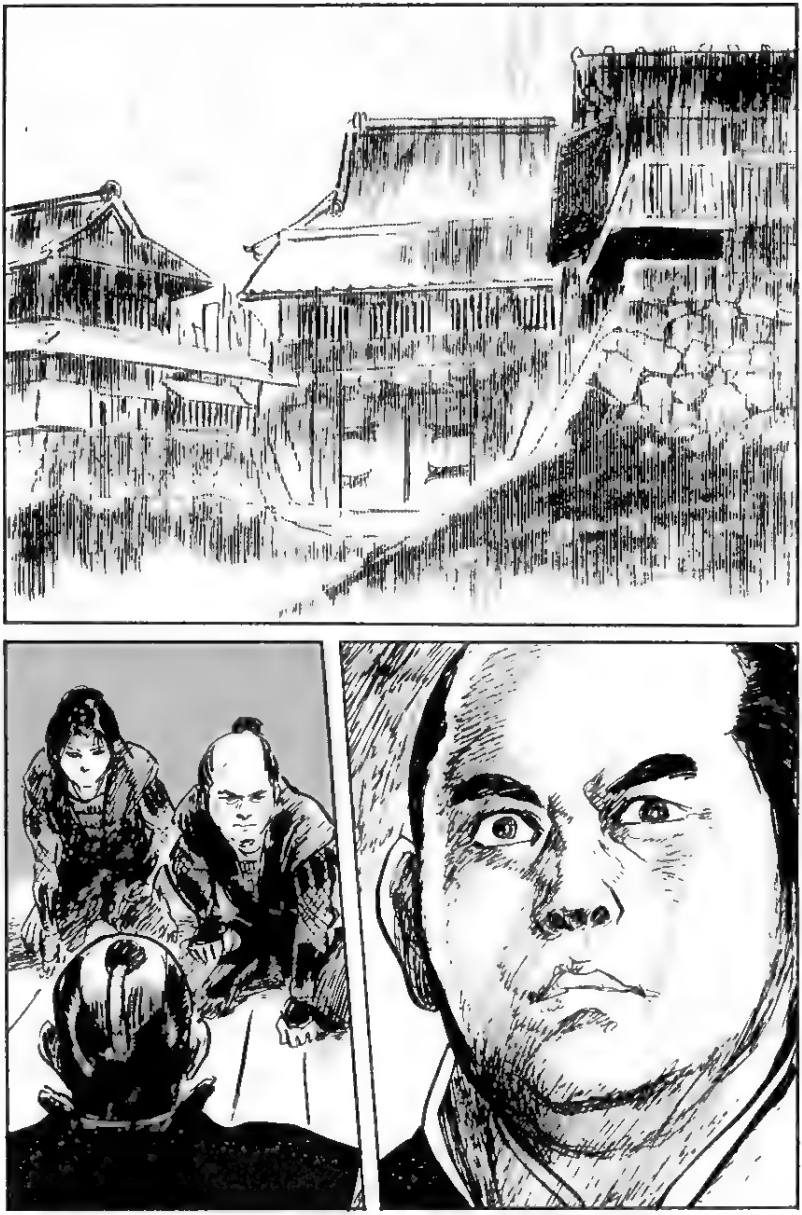
あやまれ
ドリ

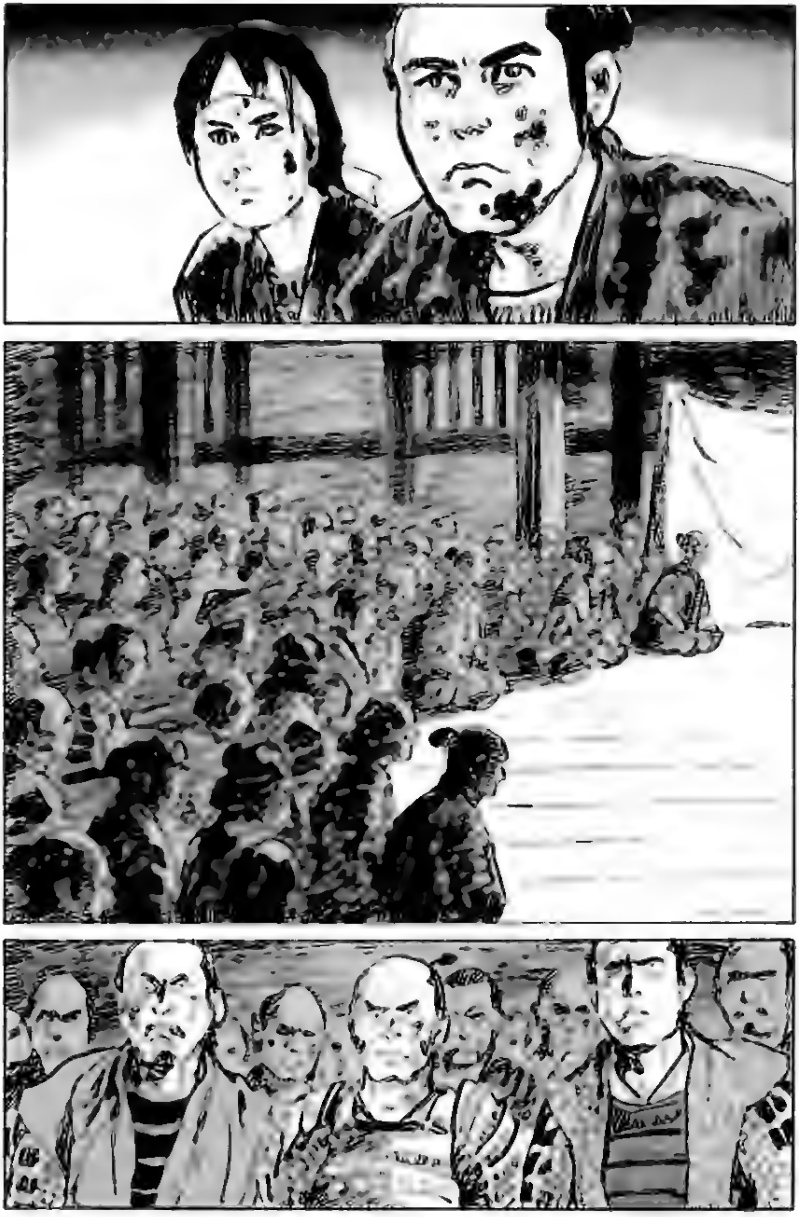
IT WAS THE VERY MOUNTAIN, THE TOWERING FUJI OF SURUGA, THAT HE HAD BEHELD SINCE HE WAS BORN INTO THIS WORLD.
IT LOOKED AS THOUGH IT WAS RESTING ON HIS PALM.
THE MOMENT BEFORE HIS HEAD WAS SEVERED, YOSHIMOTO SAW MT. FUJI.

ON MAY 19TH OF EIROKU YEAR 3 (1560 A.D.), IMAGAWA YOSHIMOTO WAS KILLED. HE WAS 42 YEARS OLD.
YOSHIMOTO EXPECTED ITS GREAT PEAK TO BECOME THE PRIMARY MOUNTAIN OF JAPAN, SPREADING ITS FOOT ACROSS THE WHOLE COUNTRY.
I CAN'T SEE THE TOMORROW... OF MY LORD... ANYMORE.

# Chapter On Relinquishing Death

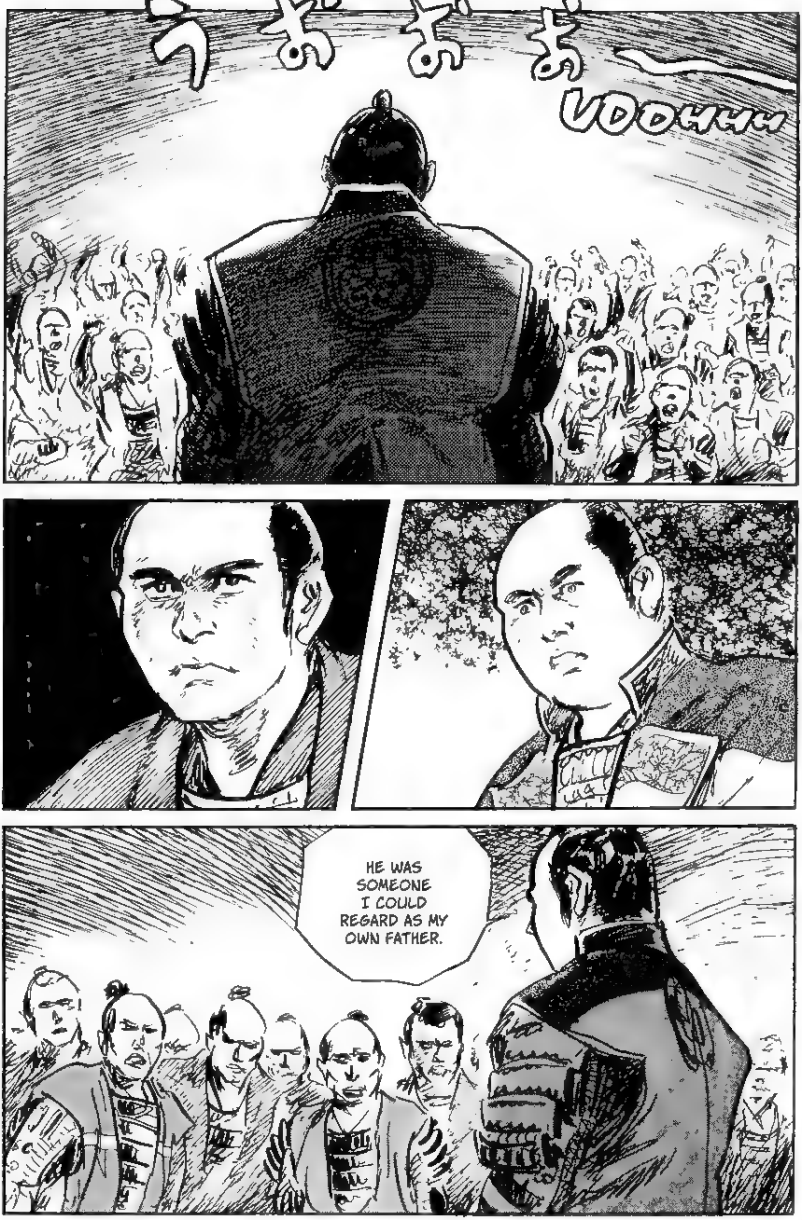
## No. 3: The Festivity is in the Waiting





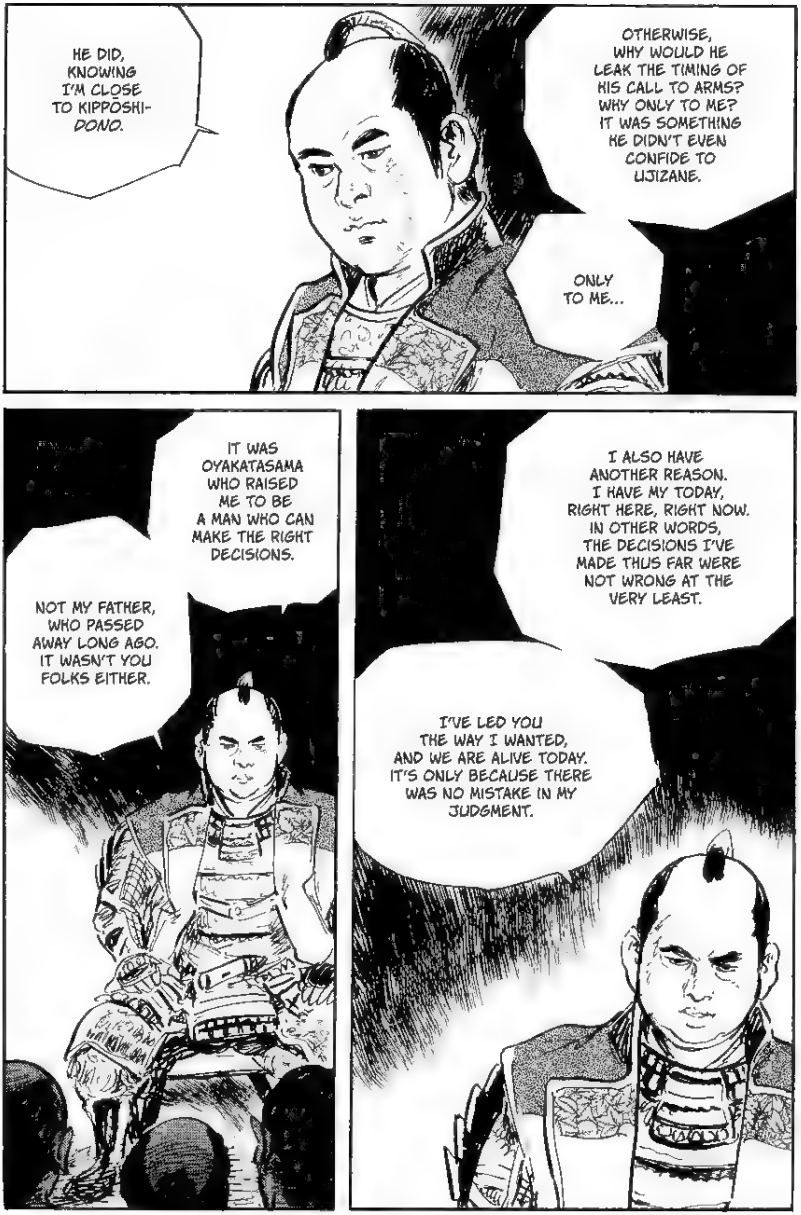
U...
U...
U...
うおお
UOOHHH
うおお
UOOHHH

TO... OKAZAKI!
TO... TO OKAZAKI... M... MILORD!
...HOLD... HOLD... OUR CASTLE... OUR OKAZAKI CASTLE...
LET US ATTACK OKAZAKI IMMEDIATELY, AND...
THIS IS A GREAT CHANCE TO BREAK AWAY FROM IMAGAWA!
MILORD!
...IN OUR HANDS.


うおおお
VOOHHH
HE WAS SOMEONE I COULD REGARD AS MY OWN FATHER.

M... MILORD! LET'S NOT MISS THIS OPPORTUNITY!
HOW MANY OF OKAZAKI'S MEN HAVE DIED BECAUSE OF HIS TACTICS!
HOW YOSHIMOTO TOOK YOU HOSTAGE AND PLACED US, MIKAWA'S WARRIORS, RIGHT AT THE FRONT EVERY TIME THEY WENT TO WAR!
AND... AND, HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN HOW WE ENDURED OUR SERVITUDE FOR MORE THAN THIRTEEN YEARS?
WE ENDURED ONLY BECAUSE WE HOPED TO HAVE YOU BACK AT OKAZAKI CASTLE ONE DAY, SOONER INSTEAD OF LATER
HAVE YOU ALREADY FORGOTTEN?

AND...
AND WHEN OUR EARNEST DESIRE IS ABOUT TO BE REALIZED, WHAT MAKES YOU LIKEN YOSHIMOTO TO YOUR FATHER?
I CANNOT HELP BUT FEEL THAT OYAKATASAMA WAS GOING TO HAND ME THE ENTIRE COUNTRY, HAD HE SUCCEEDED IN TAKING REIGN OVER THIS NATION.


HE DID, KNOWING I'M CLOSE TO KIPPOSHI-DONO.
OTHERWISE, WHY WOULD HE LEAK THE TIMING OF HIS CALL TO ARMS? WHY ONLY TO ME? IT WAS SOMETHING HE DIDN'T EVEN CONFIDE TO UJIZANE.
ONLY TO ME...
IT WAS OYAKATASAMA WHO RAISED ME TO BE A MAN WHO CAN MAKE THE RIGHT DECISIONS.
NOT MY FATHER, WHO PASSED AWAY LONG AGO. IT WASN'T YOU FOLKS EITHER.
I ALSO HAVE ANOTHER REASON. I HAVE MY TODAY, RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW. IN OTHER WORDS, THE DECISIONS I'VE MADE THUS FAR WERE NOT WRONG AT THE VERY LEAST.
I'VE LED YOU THE WAY I WANTED, AND WE ARE ALIVE TODAY. IT'S ONLY BECAUSE THERE WAS NO MISTAKE IN MY JUDGMENT.

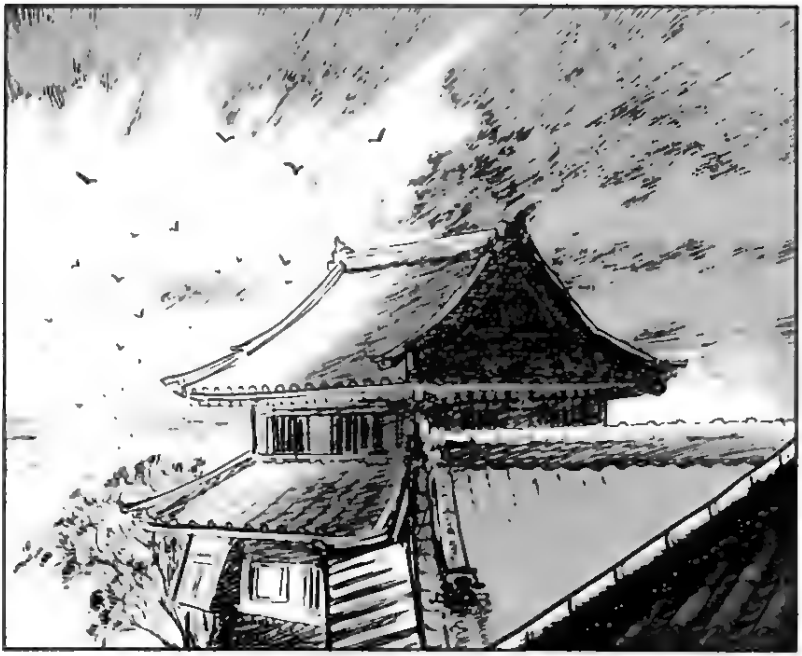
...VOICE YOUR OPINIONS.
I WILL NOT TAKE ORDERS FROM YOU. BUT YOU MAY...
AND NOW THAT OYAKATASAMA IS GONE, I WILL LIVE MY LIFE THE WAY I WANT.
INFORM THEM THAT OYAKATASAMA HAS FALLEN!
FLY TO OKAZAKI!
YES, SIR!
HANZŌ!
I'M SURE THEY HAVEN'T EVEN DREAMED OF THE POSSIBILITY.

WE MIGHT AS WELL WALK IN AFTER THE IMAGAWA FORCES IN OKAZAKI ABANDON THE CASTLE AND RETURN TO SUNPU.
THERE'S NO NEED TO ATTACK.
THEY'LL PANIC TO NO END.
IT'S A BOLT FROM THE BLUE.
TO AVOID THAT, WE WILL VACATE THIS PLACE IN THE DARK OF NIGHT AND HIDE IN THE DAIJUJI TEMPLE.
WHAT WE SHOULD WORRY ABOUT IS BEING SCOOPED UP BY KIPPŌSHI-*DONO*.

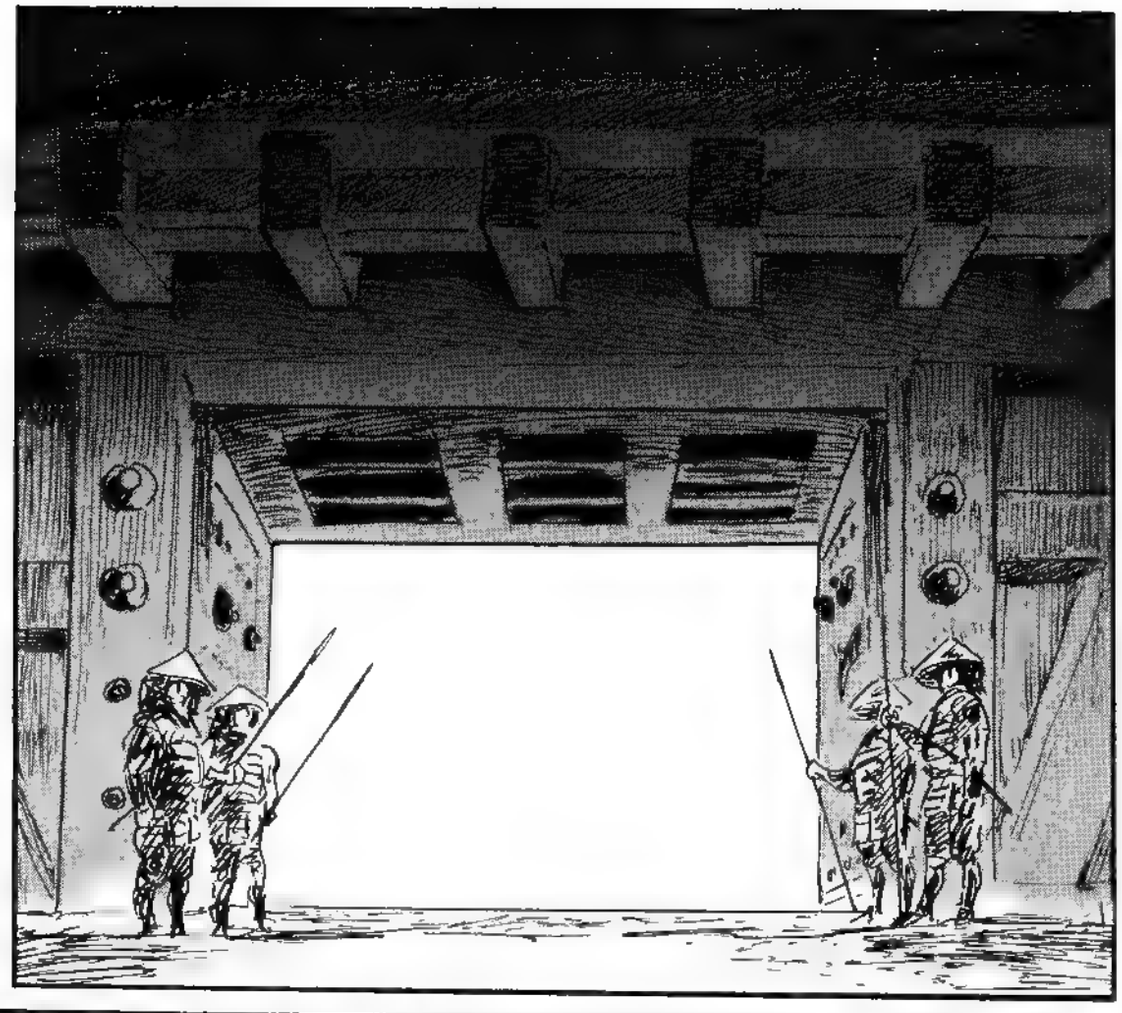
UOOHHHH
I AM NOT THE KIND OF MAN WHO'D SUBMIT TO UJIZANE!
I AM SURE OYAKATASAMA WILL NOT MIND.
THE TIME FOR US TO FAWN, GROVEL, CRAWL, AND COWER BENEATH IMAGAWA IS OVER!

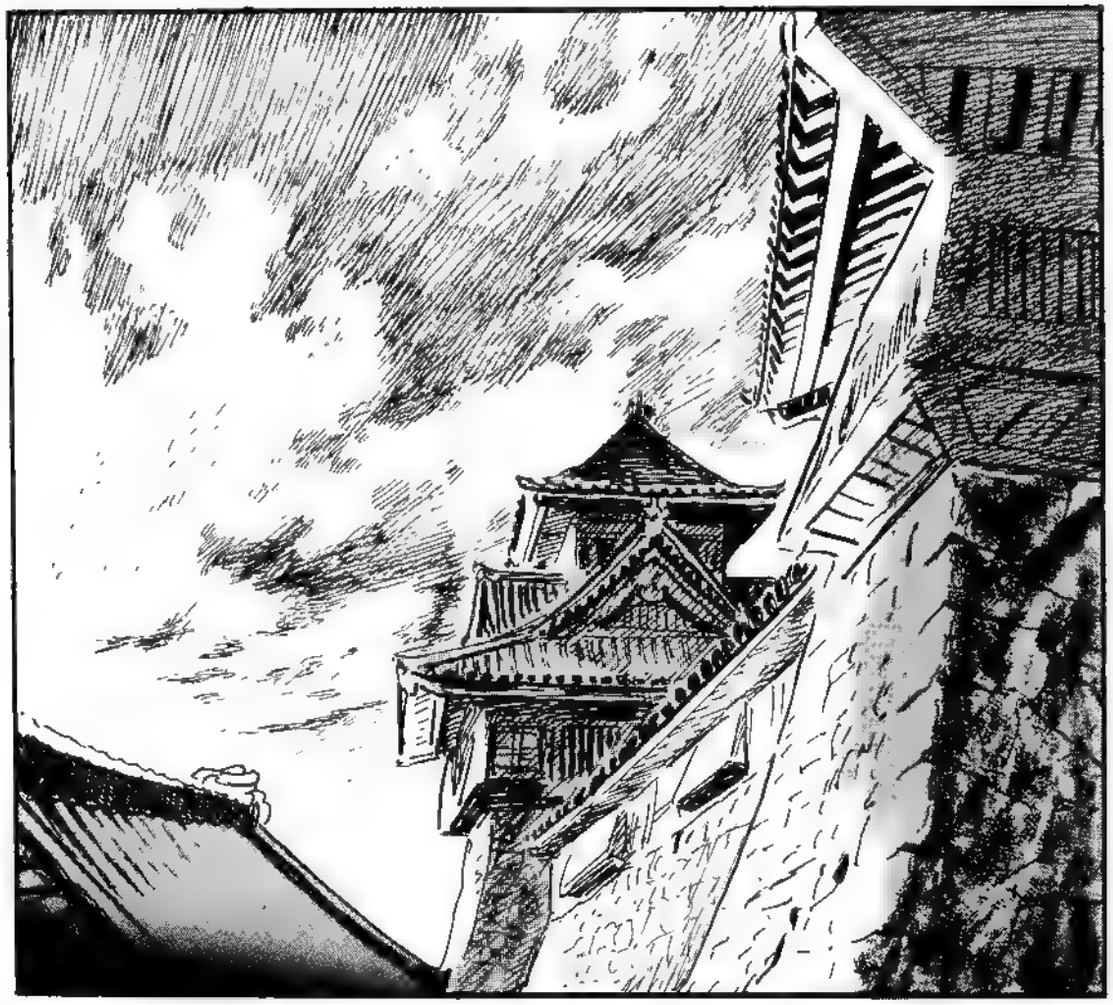
THAT DAY, IN THE THIRD YEAR OF *EIROKU* (1560 A.D.), WITHOUT LOSING A SINGLE MAN, HE WALKED INTO HIS OWN, EMPTY CASTLE AFTER HE'D LED A HOSTAGE'S LIFE FOR THIRTEEN YEARS, SINCE THE 16TH YEAR OF *TENBUN* (1547 A.D.).

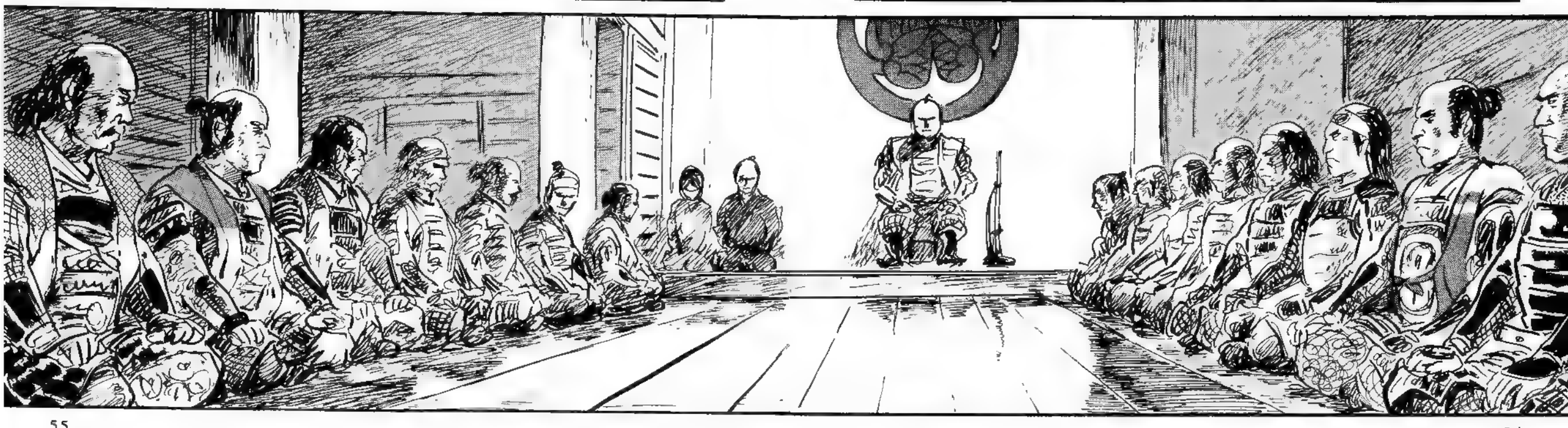
IEYASU WAITED IN THE DAIJUJI TEMPLE FOR THREE DAYS, AND HIS RECKONING PROVED RIGHT. THE IMAGAWA FORCES LEFT FOR SUNPU IN DESPERATE HASTE. ONCE THEY WERE ALL GONE, IEYASU AND HIS MEN ENTERED OKAZAKI CASTLE.



HMMM, YASUIE... IEYASU...
LET ME CROWN MY NAME WITH "IE"...
IEYASU SOUNDS GOOD, I THINK.





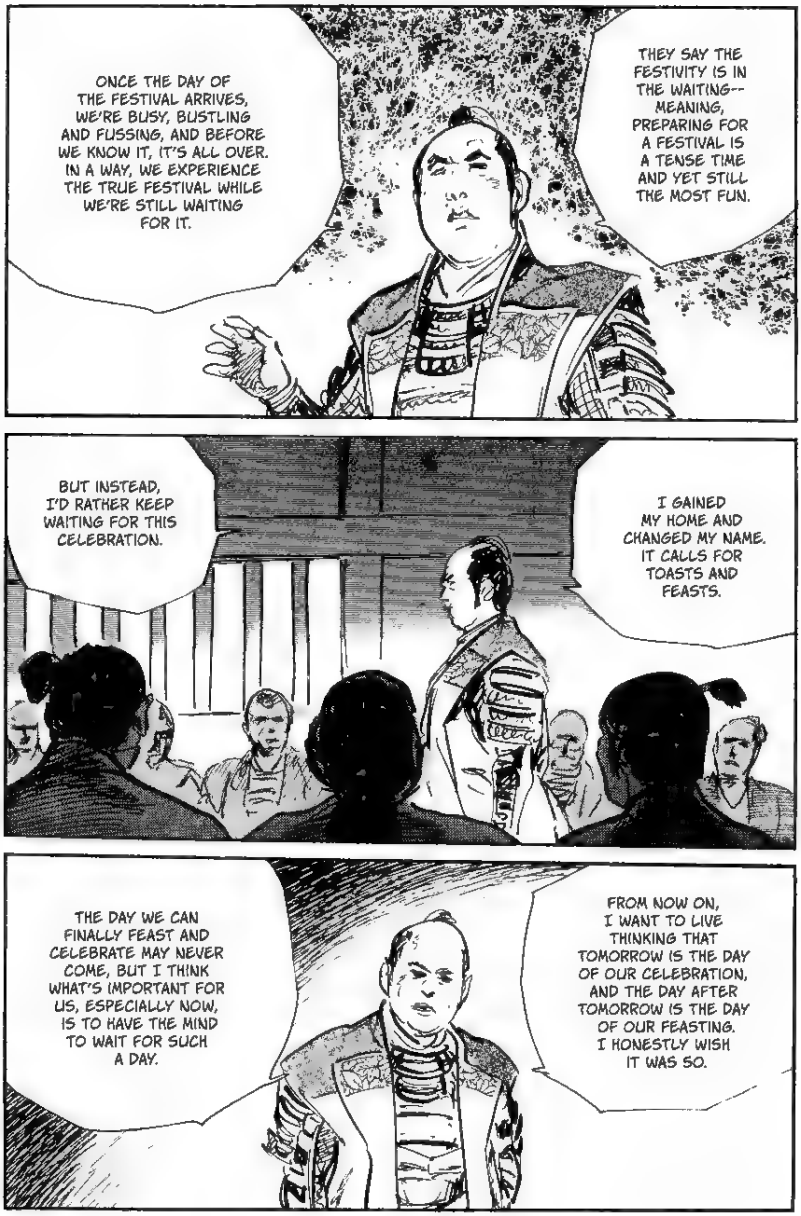


STARTING TODAY, I WILL PRESENT MYSELF AS IEYASU.

HM, THAT'S A GOOD NAME.
IEYASU... SAMA.
...I'VE DECIDED TO CALL MYSELF IEYASU.
NOW THAT I HAVE A HOME, IN THE HOPE OF BRINGING PEACE AND SAFETY...

IEYASU-SAMA.
IE-NO-YASU-SAMA.
IEYASU-SAMA.
IEYASU-SAMA.
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP

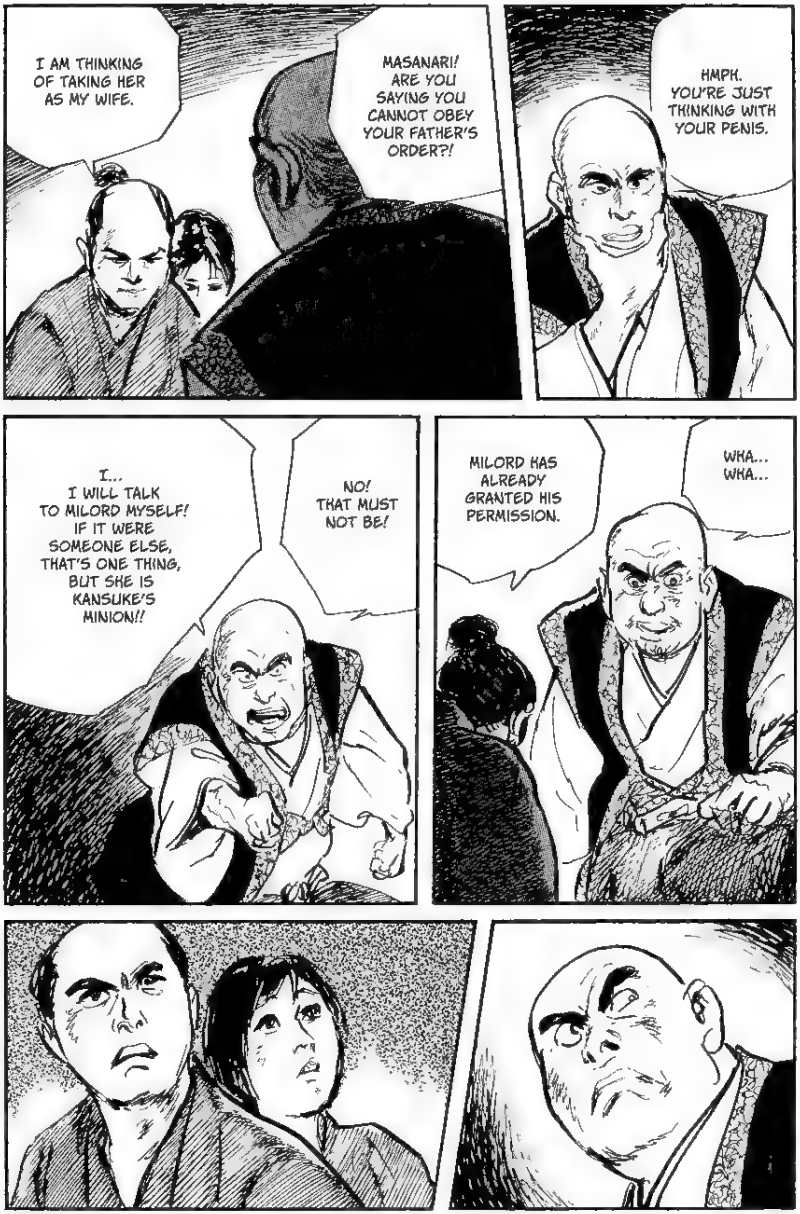
HM!
MM!
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP


ONCE THE DAY OF THE FESTIVAL ARRIVES, WE'RE BUSY, BUSTLING AND FUSSING, AND BEFORE WE KNOW IT, IT'S ALL OVER. IN A WAY, WE EXPERIENCE THE TRUE FESTIVAL WHILE WE'RE STILL WAITING FOR IT.
THEY SAY THE FESTIVITY IS IN THE WAITING-- MEANING, PREPARING FOR A FESTIVAL IS A TENSE TIME AND YET STILL THE MOST FUN.
BUT INSTEAD, I'D RATHER KEEP WAITING FOR THIS CELEBRATION.
I GAINED MY HOME AND CHANGED MY NAME. IT CALLS FOR TOASTS AND FEASTS.
THE DAY WE CAN FINALLY FEAST AND CELEBRATE MAY NEVER COME, BUT I THINK WHAT'S IMPORTANT FOR US, ESPECIALLY NOW, IS TO HAVE THE MIND TO WAIT FOR SUCH A DAY.
FROM NOW ON, I WANT TO LIVE THINKING THAT TOMORROW IS THE DAY OF OUR CELEBRATION, AND THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW IS THE DAY OF OUR FEASTING. I HONESTLY WISH IT WAS SO.

IF HE THOUGHT TOMORROW WAS THE DAY OF THEIR CELEBRATION, HE WOULD HAVE RUSHED TO ODAKA CASTLE WITHOUT A MOMENT'S DELAY.
OYAKATASAMA MUST HAVE FELT THAT THE DAY FOR HIM TO CELEBRATE HAD ALREADY COME WHEN HE WAS STILL AT OKEHAZAMA.
THUS, DO NOT DRINK SAKE. DO NOT TAKE OFF YOUR ARMOR. SET UP A TWO-SHIFT SYSTEM TO REST, AND BE PREPARED TO RESPOND TO ANY SITUATION WE FACE!
LISTEN! WE MUST NOT FORGET. FOR US, THE WARRIORS OF MIKAWA, THE FESTIVITY IS IN THE WAITING!
YES, MILORD.
MM.
FESTIVITY IS IN THE WAITING...

SHE'S A MITSUMONO... OF TAKEDA?!
IT ONLY MEANS THAT YAMAMOTO KANSUKE SENT HER! WE CANNOT ALLOW SOMEONE LIKE HER INTO THE HATTORI FAMILY.
NO! YOU MUST NOT!
WHAT IF OUR SCHEMES REACH KANSUKE'S EARS? WHAT DO YOU THINK THAT WOULD DO TO US?

THERE'S NO WAY SHE'S STRONG ENOUGH TO REPEL THAT KIND OF DANGER.
WE'RE TALKING ABOUT KANSUKE, WHO POSSESSES THE TENACITY AND SLYNESS OF A SNAKE. WHO KNOWS WHAT METHOD HE'LL USE TO COMMUNICATE WITH HER. THIS IS EXTREMELY DANGEROUS!
SHE'S LIKELY TO BECOME THE ROOT OF OUR DISASTER, AND MUST BE PULLED OUT WHILE WE HAVE THE CHANCE!
I AM THE VERY FIRST MAN TSUKUMO EVER HAD.
BANISH HER IMMEDIATELY!

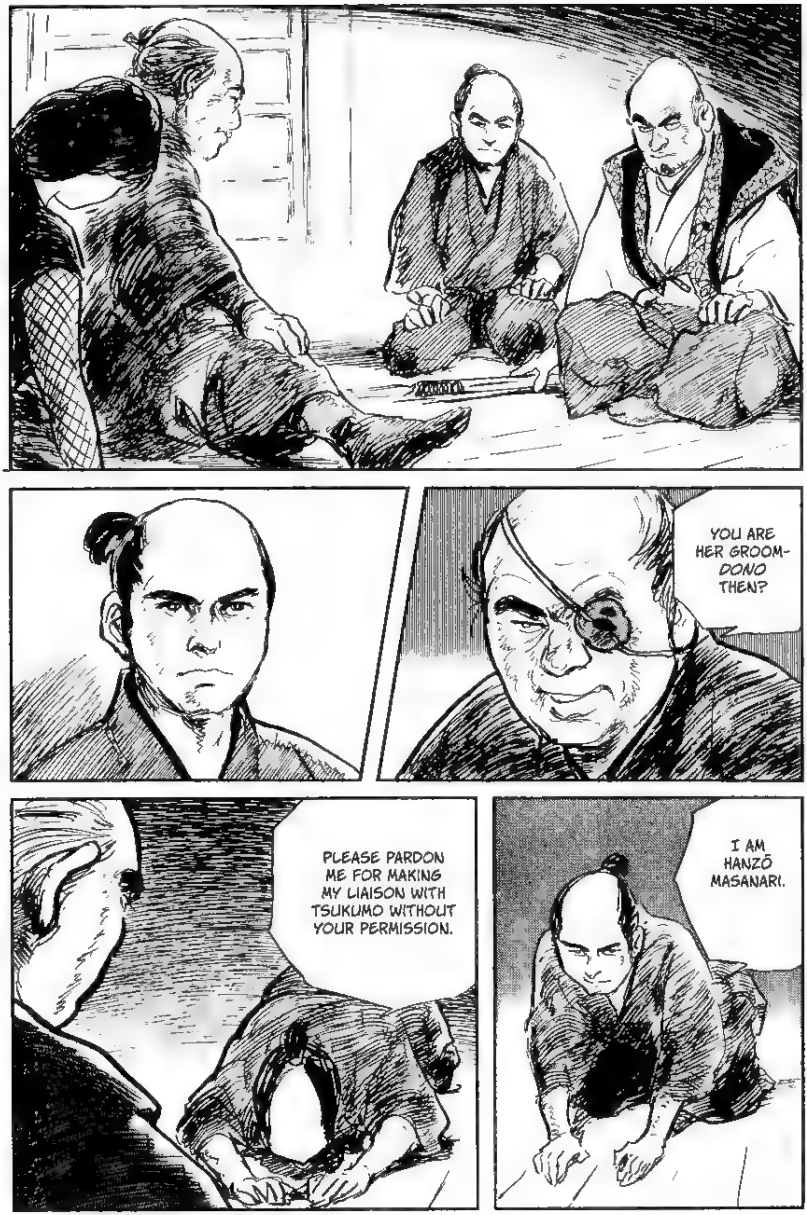

I AM THINKING OF TAKING HER AS MY WIFE.
MASANARI! ARE YOU SAYING YOU CANNOT OBEY YOUR FATHER'S ORDER?!
HMPH. YOU'RE JUST THINKING WITH YOUR PENIS.
I... I WILL TALK TO MILORD MYSELF! IF IT WERE SOMEONE ELSE, THAT'S ONE THING, BUT SHE IS KANSUKE'S MINION!!
NO! THAT MUST NOT BE!
MILORD HAS ALREADY GRANTED HIS PERMISSION.
WHA... WHA...

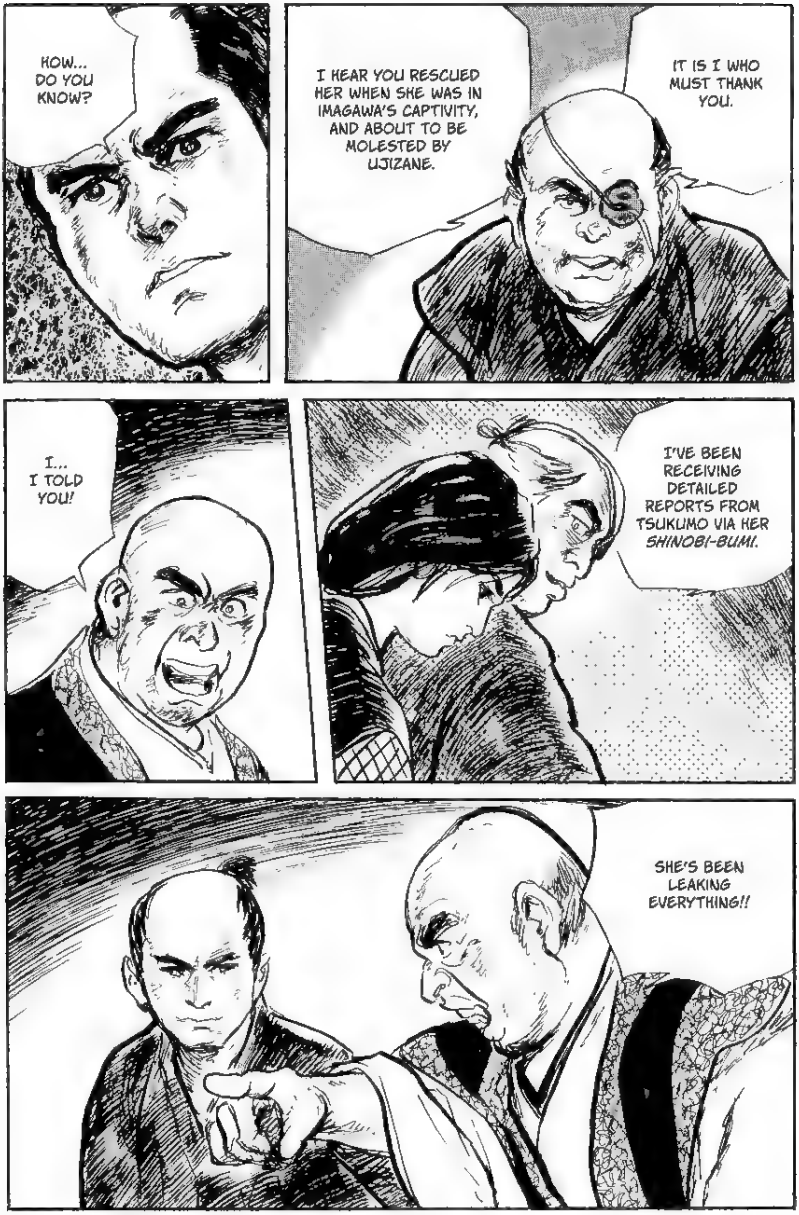
MM!
W...
WAIT,
PLEASE!!
FATHER!

IT'S A CAT THAT'S UP THE ROOF.
I'M YAMAMOTO KANSUKE DŌKISAI, THE MAN WHO CONTROLS THE TAKEDA *MITSUMONO*-- THE VERY MAN YOU SPOKE OF EARLIER.
WHO... WHO ARE YOU?!
GAK!

TSUKUMO IS MY DAUGHTER.
YOU'VE GROWN SENILE, JŌKANNYŪDŌ. IF I WAS IN YOUR POSITION, I'D BE DELIGHTED AND LET THEM MARRY RIGHT AWAY.
HEH HEH HEH HEH HEH HEH.

MM!
COME, SIT, JŌKAN-NYŪDŌ.
NO HOST WOULD BE STANDING WHEN HIS GUEST SITS DOWN.

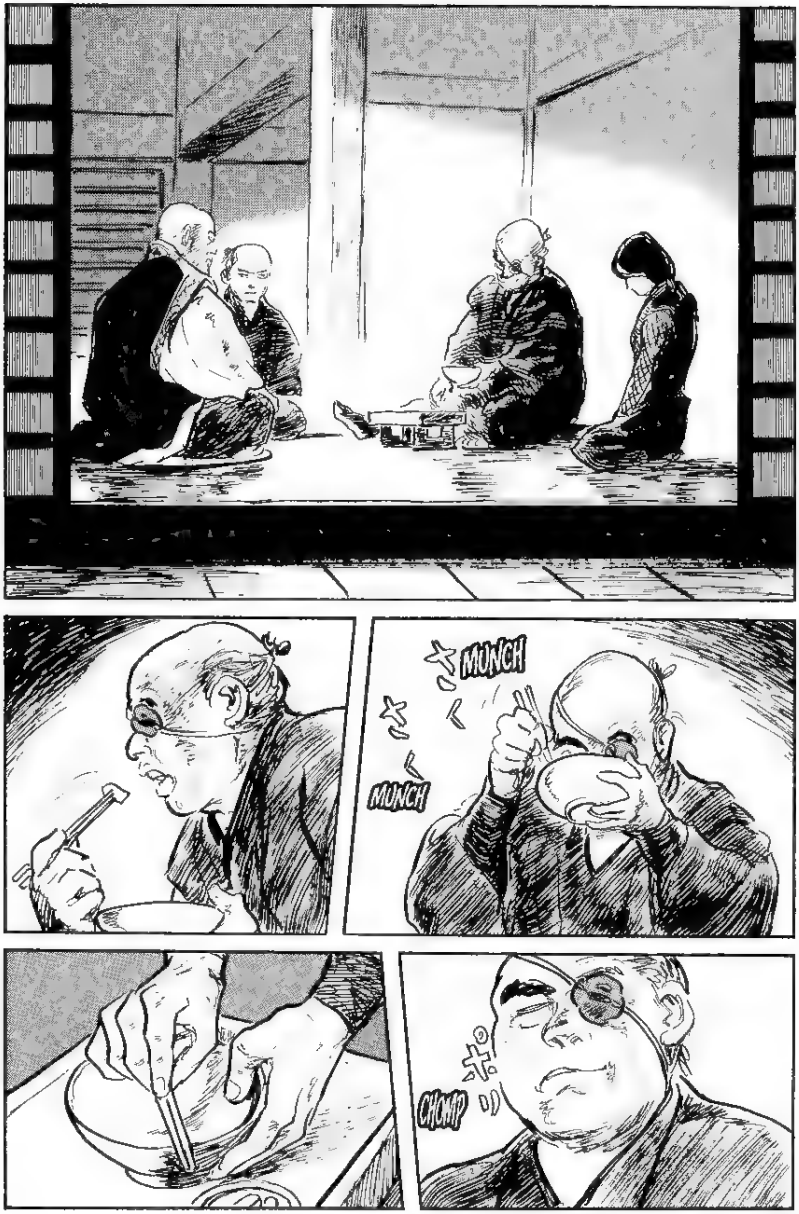

YOU ARE HER GROOM-DONO THEN?
PLEASE PARDON ME FOR MAKING MY LIAISON WITH TSUKUMO WITHOUT YOUR PERMISSION.
I AM HANZŌ MASANARI.


HOW... DO YOU KNOW?
I HEAR YOU RESCUED HER WHEN SHE WAS IN IMAGAWA'S CAPTIVITY, AND ABOUT TO BE MOLESTED BY UJIZANE.
IT IS I WHO MUST THANK YOU.
I... I TOLD YOU!
I'VE BEEN RECEIVING DETAILED REPORTS FROM TSUKUMO VIA HER SHINOBI-BUMI.
SHE'S BEEN LEAKING EVERYTHING!!

SPEAK AFTER YOU ASCERTAIN THE STATE OF AFFAIRS, NOT BEFORE!
DON'T LOSE YOUR HEAD, JŌKANNYŪDŌ! THE MAN IN FRONT OF YOU IS YAMAMOTO KANSUKE DŌKISAI, THE MILITARY ADVISOR OF TAKEDA!
LET ME PUT IT LIKE THIS. I AM IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND! WHY SHOULD YOU PANIC?!
OUT OF MY LOVE FOR MY DAUGHTER, I CAME ALONE, A LONG WAY!

HM!
BESIDES, WE ARE FELLOW SUPPA.
IT'S NOT LIKE TAKEDA AND MATSUDAIRA ARE AT ODDS.
PRECIOUS ENOUGH TO CAUSE THE ILLUSTRIOUS JŌKANNYŪDŌ TO LOSE HIS HEAD
I SAY HANZO MUST BE AN EXCEPTIONAL SON OF YOURS.
SHE'S AN EXCELLENT DAUGHTER THAT'S WHY I'M HERE, EXPOSING HOW FOOLISH I AM AS A FATHER. HEH HEH HEH.
IT'S THE SAME WITH ME.

HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA
HA HA
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA
HA HA


MUNCH
MUNCH
CHOMP

WHEN I SAID EARLIER THAT IF I WAS IN YOUR POSITION, I'D BE DELIGHTED AND LET THEM MARRY RIGHT AWAY... I MEANT EVERY WORD.
BUT THAT ONLY SHOWS YOU DO NOT TRUST YOUR SON'S JUDGMENT.
YOU SAID YOU CANNOT ALLOW SOMEONE LIKE TSUKUMO INTO THE HATTORI FAMILY BECAUSE YOU'RE AFRAID SHE'LL PASS YOUR PLANS ONTO TAKEDA.
DO YOU THINK HANZO WOULD TAKE A BRIDE WHO'D BETRAY HIS TRUST?

MHH!
DESPITE THAT, YOU DO NOT. THIS ONLY MEANS YOU DO NOT TRUST HIS THINKING.
HE IS CONFIDENT THAT SHE LOVES HIM COMPLETELY AND IS WILLING TO THROW AWAY TAKEDA--EVEN HER OWN FATHER. THAT'S WHY HE SOUGHT PERMISSION FROM HIS MASTER AND NOW SEEKS YOUR BLESSING AS WELL.
CHOMP
...BECAUSE I CAN SEE SHE IS IN LOVE WITH HANZÔ AND WILL NEVER CROSS KIM.
NOW, LET'S PUT OURSELVES IN MY POSITION. IT MEANS I MUST GIVE UP MY PRECIOUS DAUGHTER...

ALL SHE TOLD ME WAS WHY SHE'S IN LOVE WITH HANZŌ AND WHY SHE WANTS TO MARRY HIM.
B... BUT... SHE'S BEEN REPORTING... VIA *SHINOBI-BUMI*...
TO TELL THE TRUTH, JŌKANNYŪDŌ, I NEVER WANTED TSUKUMO TO BECOME A *SUPPA*.
TSUKUMO HAS USED SOAPBERRY TREES TO LEAVE HER *SHINOBI-BUMI*, BUT I EXPECT NO MORE MESSAGES WILL COME FROM HER NOW.
IT'S EASY TO FORESEE WHAT WILL BECOME OF A FEMALE *SUPPA*. SHE IS JUST A *KUNOICHI*, AFTER ALL. DIRTIED, EXHAUSTED, AND BEATEN, WHAT AWAITS HER IS DEATH.

AND YET, THAT MADE ME ADORE HER EVEN MORE.
BUT, NO MATTER HOW I TRIED TO TELL HER, SHE WOULDN'T LISTEN. SHE WAS A TOMBOY, YOU KNOW. SO I HAD TO GIVE UP ON HER FUTURE.
AND THEN, SHE TOLD ME SHE WAS GOING TO MARRY A MAN SHE LOVED. I WONDERED WHAT RANDOM THUG THIS MIGHT BE, BUT IT TURNED OUT IT'S A SON OF JŌKANNYŪDŌ.
HE'S A *SUPPA* TO BOOT, JUST AS SHE IS. NO ONE COULD'VE HOPED FOR A MATCH AS GOOD AS THIS.
IN THIS TIME OF WARRING STATES, NO WOMAN GETS TO BE WITH A MAN SHE LOVES.

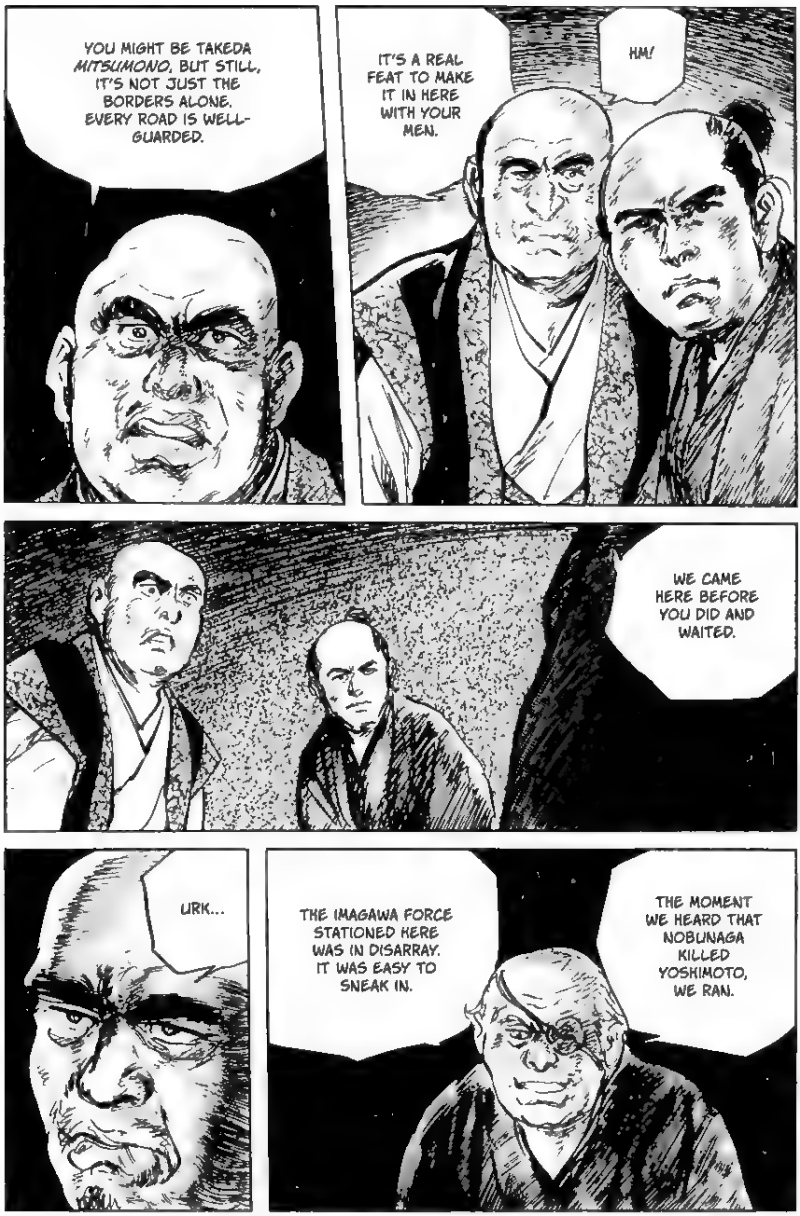
YOU MADE YOUR POINT. I UNDERSTAND. I'LL HAVE THEM WED RIGHT AWAY.
AND THAT'S WHY I TRAVELED THIS DISTANCE...
THAT'S WHY I SAID I'D BE DELIGHTED AND LET THEM MARRY.
YEAH?
FATHER.
PLEASE HOLD ON.
URK...
WHEN YOU SHED TEARS ONLY FROM ONE EYE, THEY'RE FAKE.

...TEARS SHOULD ALSO FLOW DOWN FROM BEHIND THE SWORD GUARD.
IF YOU TRULY FEEL WHAT YOU SAID ABOUT ME...
BUT WHENEVER TEARS STREAM FROM ONLY ONE EYE, SOMETHING ALWAYS HAPPENS AFTERWARD.
WHEN MOTHER DIED, YOU SHED TEARS THAT WAY.

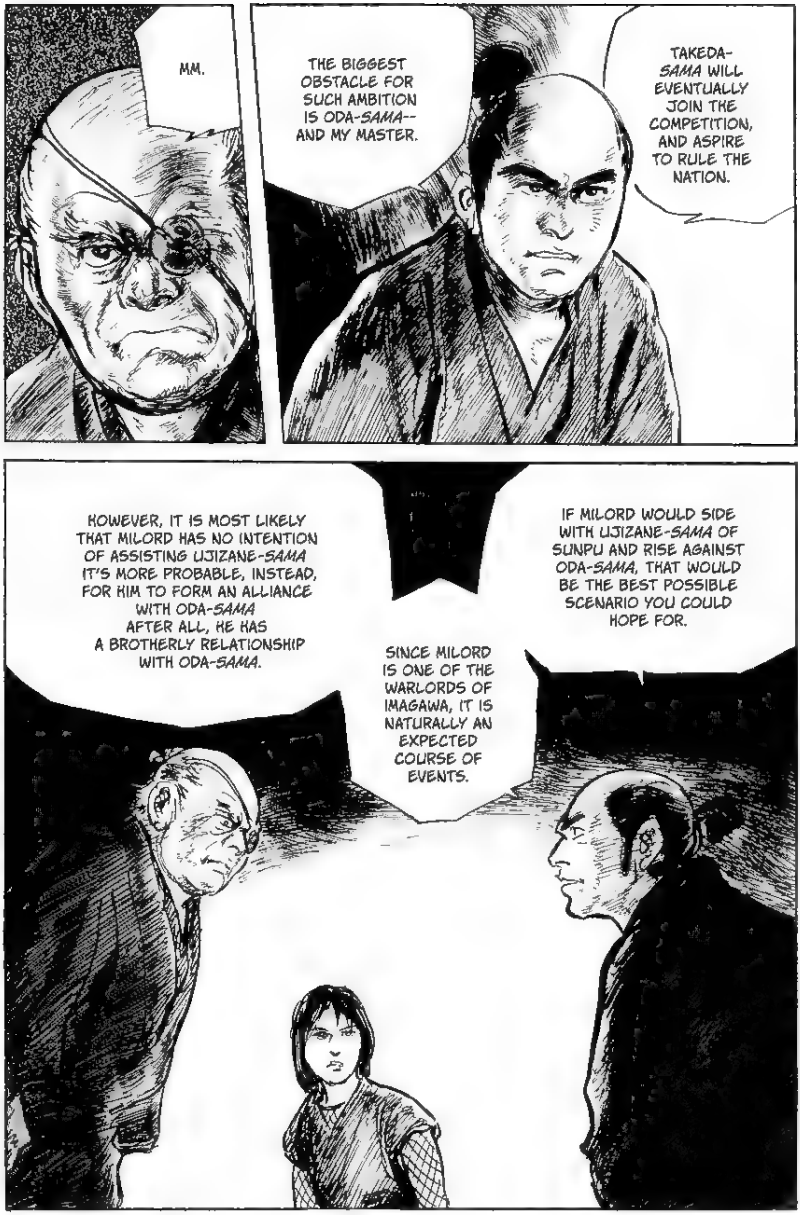
I DO NOT BELIEVE YOU WERE SINCERE.
I WILL NOT ALLOW A TAKEDA *MITSUMONO* TO MARRY IGA'S HOODLUM!

YOU MUST COME WITH ME! I HAVE MY MEN SURROUNDING THIS HOUSE.
I'VE COME TO TAKE YOU HOME, TSUKUMO!
JOKAÑ AND HANZŌ MUST DIE!

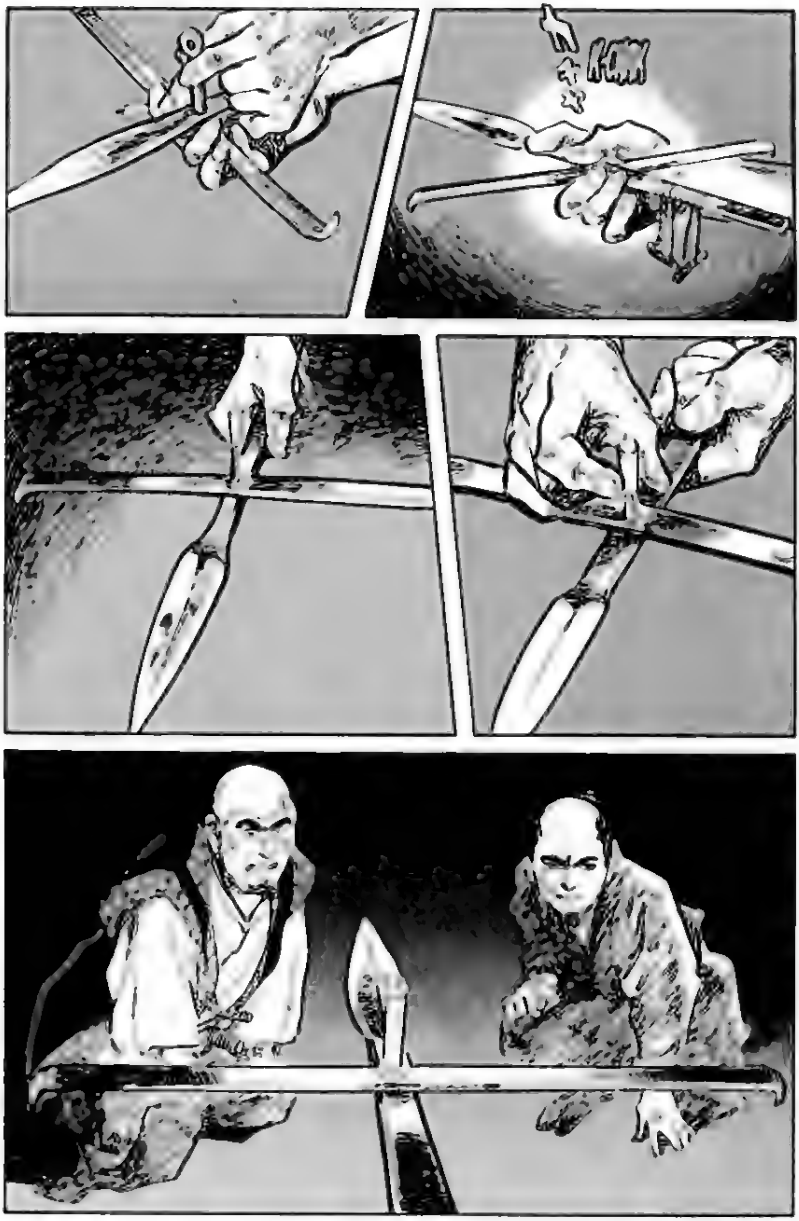
I KNEW AHEAD THAT ALL IGAMONO, EXCEPT YOU AND HANZŌ, HAVE GONE TO SCOUT ODA'S MOVEMENTS!
IT'S YOUR BLUNDER, JŌKANNYŪDŌ.
PHWEET
PHWEET
PHWEET
PHWEET


YOU MIGHT BE TAKEDA MITSUMONO, BUT STILL, IT'S NOT JUST THE BORDERS ALONE. EVERY ROAD IS WELL-GUARDED.
IT'S A REAL FEAT TO MAKE IT IN HERE WITH YOUR MEN.
HM!
WE CAME HERE BEFORE YOU DID AND WAITED.
URK...
THE IMAGAWA FORCE STATIONED HERE WAS IN DISARRAY. IT WAS EASY TO SNEAK IN.
THE MOMENT WE HEARD THAT NOBUNAGA KILLED YOSHIMOTO, WE RAN.

I CAN SEE YOUR DAUGHTER IS PRECIOUS...
SO, YOU ARRIVED TWO DAYS AFTER WE DID. HEH HEH HEH HEH HEH.
YOU WERE AT THE DAIJUJI TEMPLE, WAITING FOR THEM TO VACATE THE CASTLE.
WHAT'S YOUR TAKE ON MY MOVE?
LET ME ASK YOUR SON.
YOU'VE ALLOWED YOUR KINSHIP TO PUT YOUR MEN IN DANGER.
BUT, FOR SOMEONE LIKE THE MILITARY ADVISOR OF TAKEDA TO BRING HIS MEN WITH HIM AND RISK THIS PERIL SEEMS STRANGE.
UNTIL YOU FINISH YOUR WORDS, I WON'T ATTACK. ANSWER ME WITHOUT CONCERN.


MM.
THE BIGGEST OBSTACLE FOR SUCH AMBITION IS ODA-SAMA-- AND MY MASTER.
TAKEDA-SAMA WILL EVENTUALLY JOIN THE COMPETITION, AND ASPIRE TO RULE THE NATION.
HOWEVER, IT IS MOST LIKELY THAT MILORD HAS NO INTENTION OF ASSISTING UJIZANE-SAMA IT'S MORE PROBABLE, INSTEAD, FOR HIM TO FORM AN ALLIANCE WITH ODA-SAMA AFTER ALL, HE HAS A BROTHERLY RELATIONSHIP WITH ODA-SAMA.
SINCE MILORD IS ONE OF THE WARLORDS OF IMAGAWA, IT IS NATURALLY AN EXPECTED COURSE OF EVENTS.
IF MILORD WOULD SIDE WITH UJIZANE-SAMA OF SUNPU AND RISE AGAINST ODA-SAMA, THAT WOULD BE THE BEST POSSIBLE SCENARIO YOU COULD HOPE FOR.

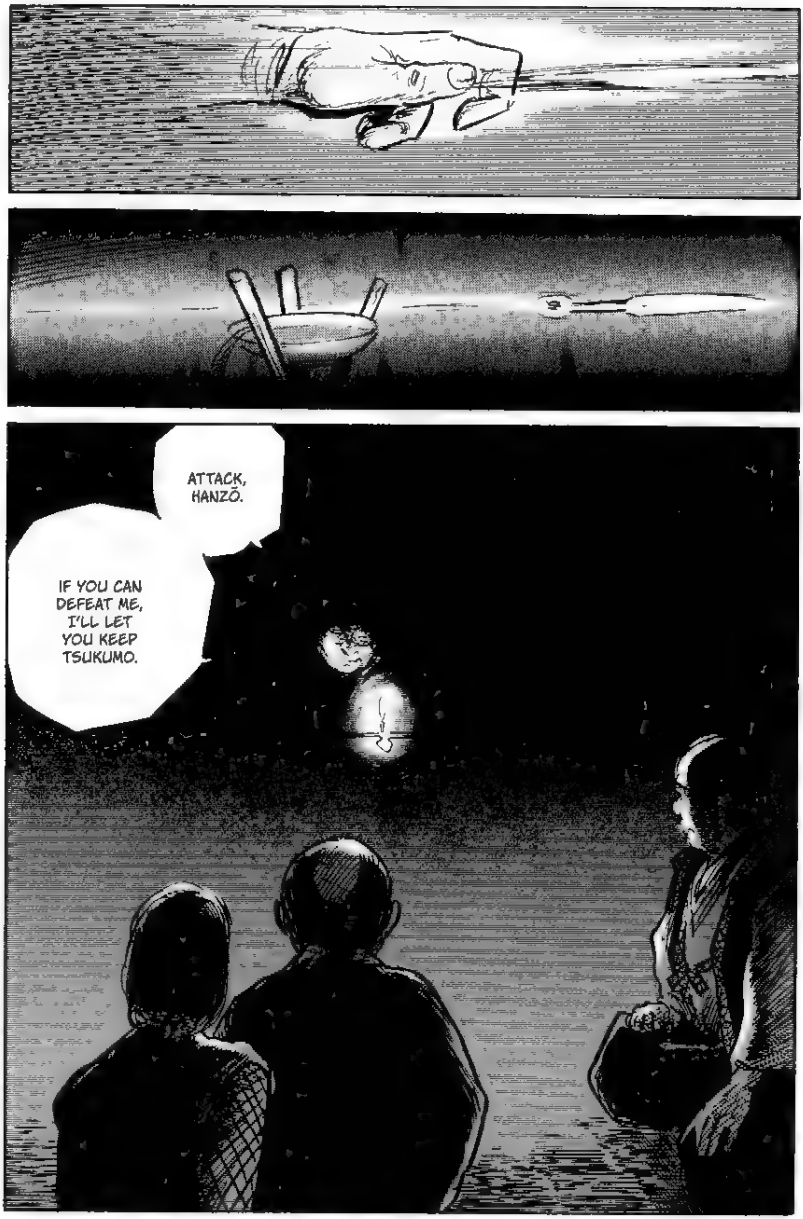
IF THAT'S THE CASE, FOR TAKEDA, THE ALLIANCE BETWEEN ODA AND MILORD IS AN EYESORE AND A POWERFUL ENEMY.
TSUKUMO IS FAMILIAR WITH YOUR AFFAIRS, AND YOU HAVE YOUR OWN POSITION TO DEFEND.
I CAN SEE HOW YOU CANNOT LET YOUR DAUGHTER MARRY A VASSAL OF YOUR POTENTIALLY GREATEST ENEMY.
WITH A BRAIN LIKE YOURS, I'M SORRY TO KILL YOU.


KLAK

IT WASN'T MY AFFECTION FOR MY DAUGHTER THAT BROUGHT ME HERE. IT WAS TO TAKE HER BACK. BUT IF I LEFT A MAN SHE LOVES BEHIND, IT'S LIKE LEAVING CINDERS IN A JAR. WHO KNOWS WHEN THE FIRE MAY REKINDLE
TSUKUMO KNOWS TOO MUCH ABOUT US *MITSUMONO*. DO YOU THINK I CAN ALLOW SOMEONE LIKE HER TO BE WITH THOSE WHO WILL BECOME OUR WORST RIVAL?!
THUS, I MUST KILL YOU, HANZO, AND MAKE HER FORGET.
AND IF TSUKUMO REFUSES TO RETURN, I MUST KILL HER TOO.

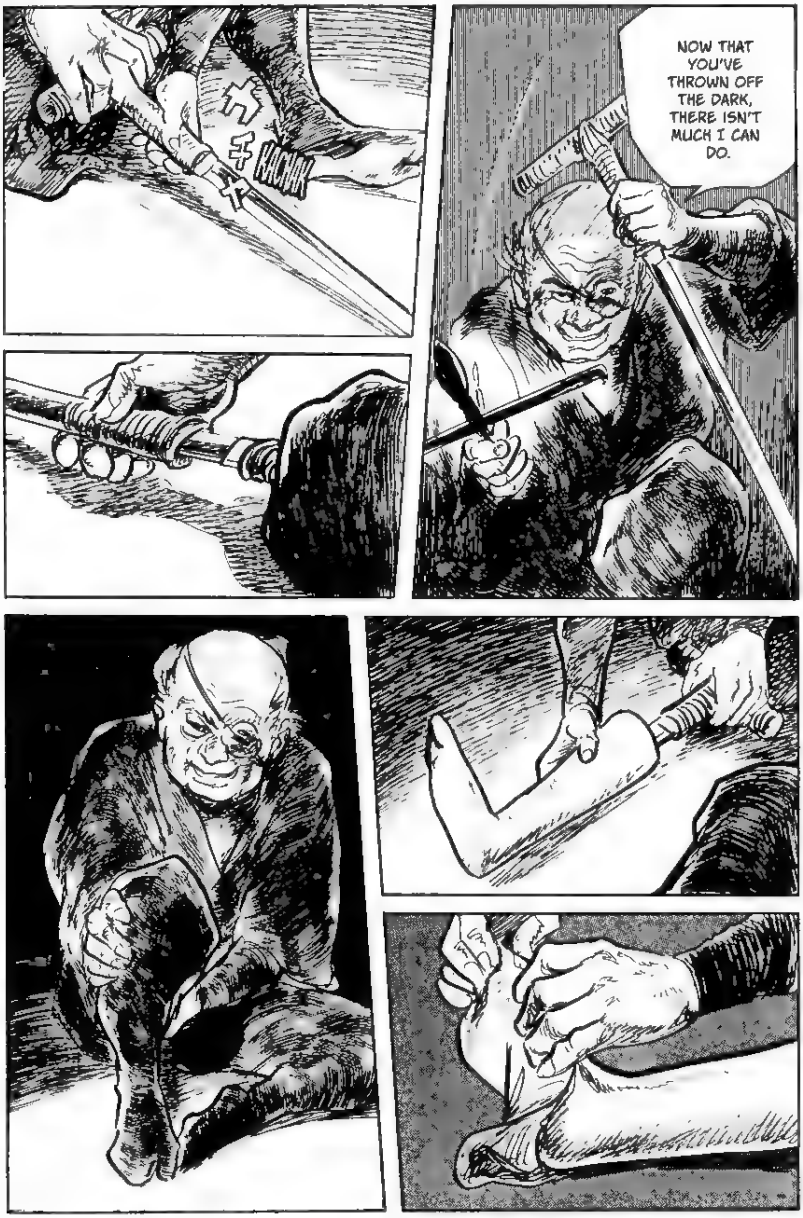
FOOF
EITHER WAY THIS COULD NOT BE RESOLVED WITHOUT ME COMING
MOVE BACK, TSUKUMO

YOU CHOOSE TO DIE WITH HANZŌ, THEN?
IT CAN'T BE HELPED.
YES.


ATTACK, HANZŌ.
IF YOU CAN DEFEAT ME, I'LL LET YOU KEEP TSUKUMO.

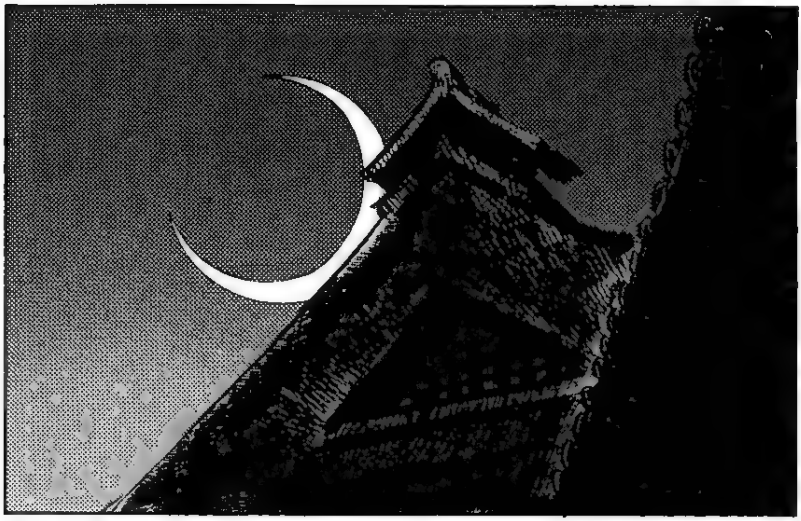
I'VE HEARD OF IT BEFORE. SUPPA LIKE US CAN SEE WELL IN THE DARK, BUT BY SHINING A LIGHT IN OUR EYES, IT ACTUALLY BLINDS US, MAKING IT IMPOSSIBLE TO SEE HOW HE USES HIS WEAPON!
DO NOT LOWER YOUR GUARD, MASANARI! IT'S THE YAMAMOTO-RYU ART OF MARUHOSHI!
NOW, HANZÔ, CAN YOU BEAT IT?!
YOU NEVER DISAPPOINT ME, JÔKAN I'VE NEVER EVEN SHOWN TSUKUMO THE ART OF MARUHOSHI IN ACTION
HOWEVER, THERE ARE ALWAYS OTHER LIGHTS IN A HOUSE
I MUST SAY, I WON'T BE ABLE TO DO THAT IN THE DARK

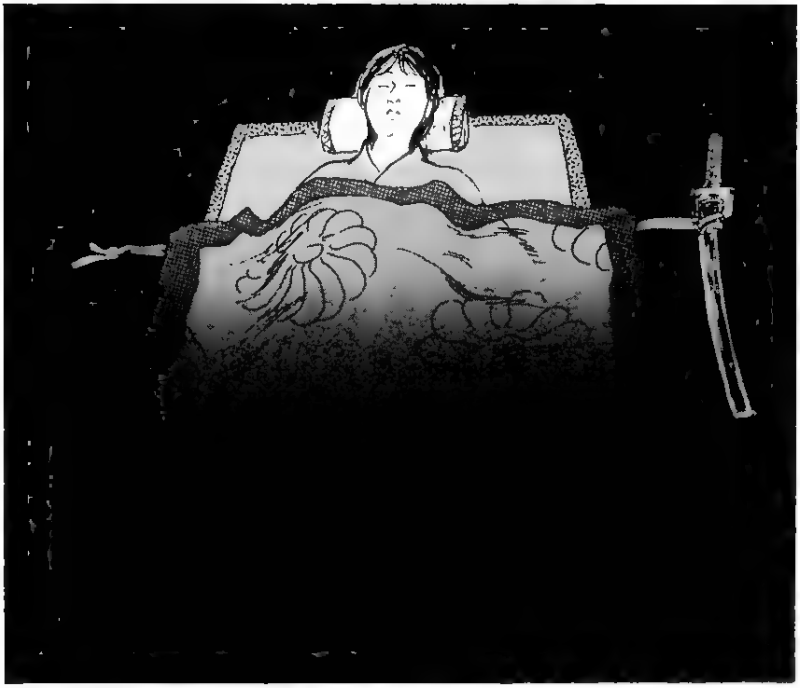
GAK!
YOU WON'T BE TRICKED INTO AN ATTACK. INSTEAD, YOU'D LIGHT A CANDLE. HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.

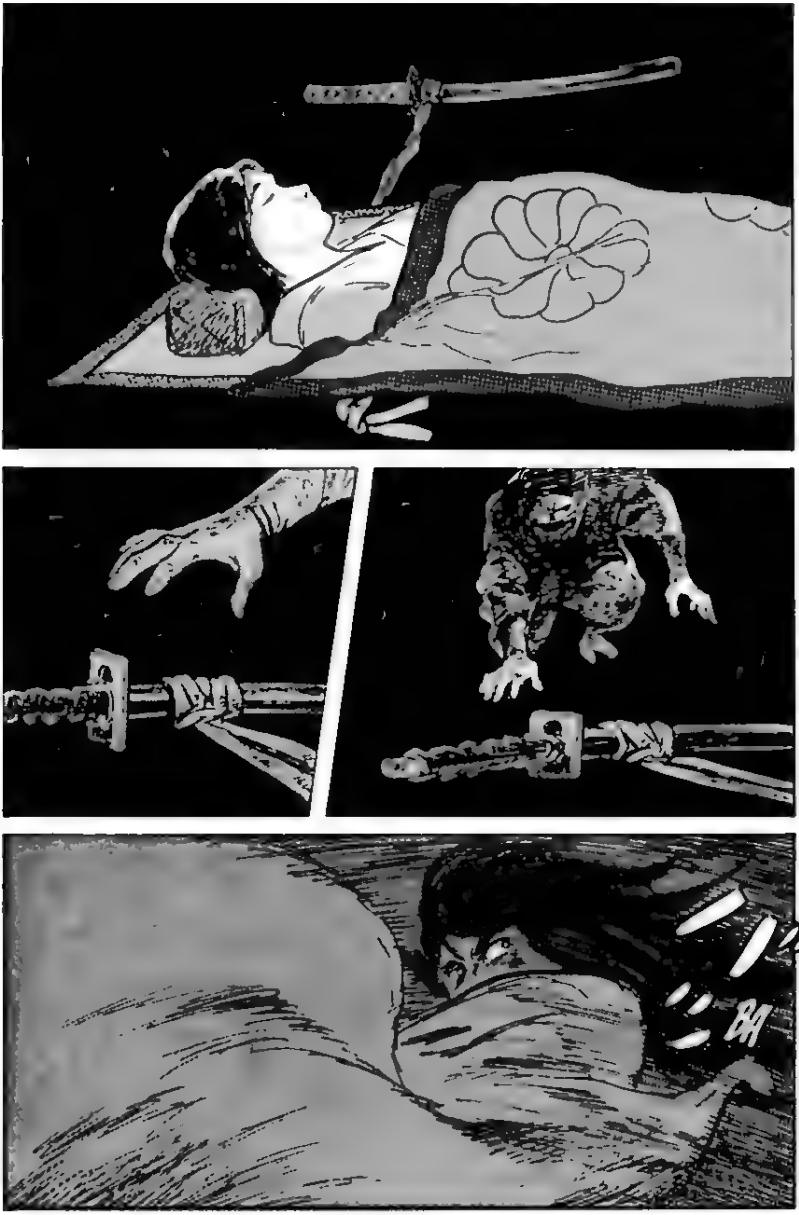

NOW THAT YOU'VE THROWN OFF THE DARK, THERE ISN'T MUCH I CAN DO.

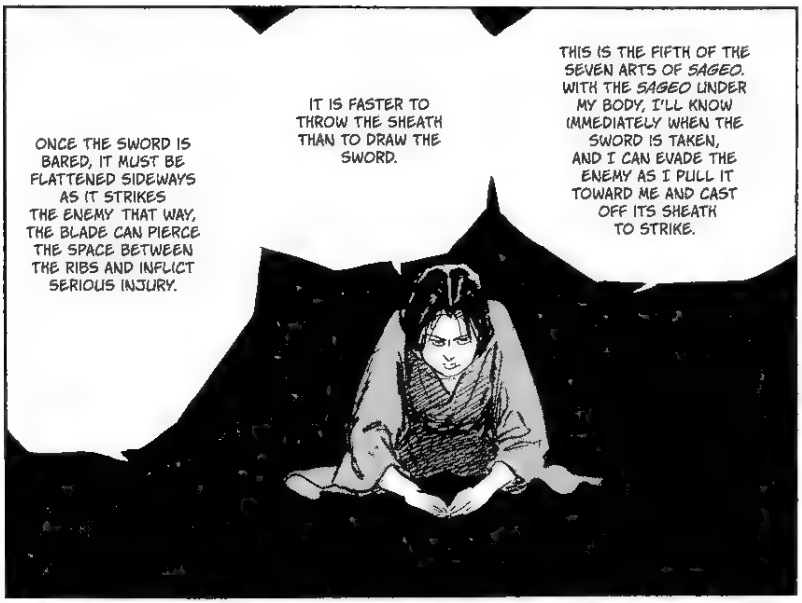
SHE IS READY TO SEVER TIES WITH ME AND DIE WITH HANZÔ. HEH HEH HEH HEH HEH HEH.
JÔKAN! YOU'VE SEEN TSUKUMO'S TRUE HEART.
UWA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
BECAUSE I WANTED TO SHOW YOU THAT, I HAD TO PLAY TWO ROLES!
FAREWELL, TSUKUMO WE ARE NO LONGER FATHER AND DAUGHTER
TSUKUMO WILL MAKE A GOOD BRIDE FOR THE HATTORI FAMILY MAKE SURE YOU TREAT HER WITH CARE!

KANZŌ! I WILL SEE YOU ON THE BATTLEFIELD, NEXT TIME.
FATHER!
URK... BUT NO SURPRISE THERE. YAMAMOTO KANSUKE DŌKISAI... HE IS *MAROHOSHI* HIMSELF. HOW FORMIDABLE
IT'S... IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO PIN HIM DOWN... HE... HE HAD US DANCING ANY WAY HE WANTED THE ENTIRE TIME.
WAKHH.

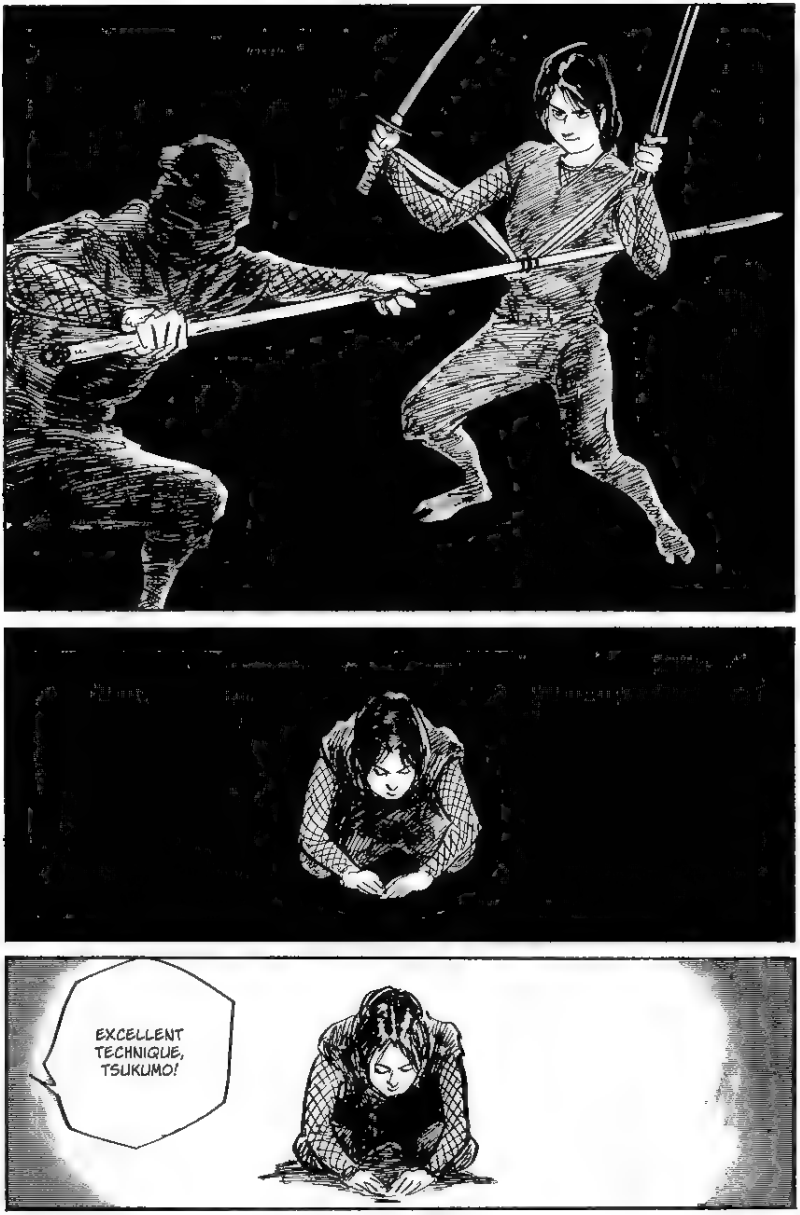


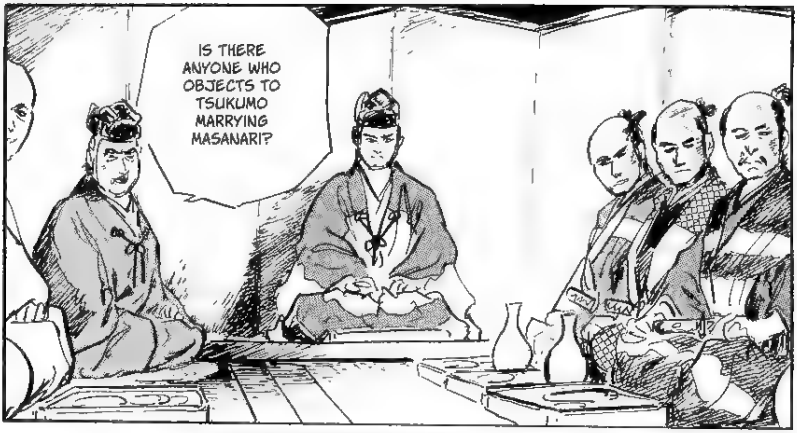



BA


ONCE THE SWORD IS BARED, IT MUST BE FLATTENED SIDEWAYS AS IT STRIKES THE ENEMY THAT WAY, THE BLADE CAN PIERCE THE SPACE BETWEEN THE RIBS AND INFLICT SERIOUS INJURY.
IT IS FASTER TO THROW THE SHEATH THAN TO DRAW THE SWORD.
THIS IS THE FIFTH OF THE SEVEN ARTS OF SAGEO. WITH THE SAGEO UNDER MY BODY, I'LL KNOW IMMEDIATELY WHEN THE SWORD IS TAKEN, AND I CAN EVADE THE ENEMY AS I PULL IT TOWARD ME AND CAST OFF ITS SHEATH TO STRIKE.

THE SIXTH OF THE SEVEN ARTS OF SAGEO-- STOPPING A SPEAR BY SEIZING ITS SHAFT.


EXCELLENT TECHNIQUE, TSUKUMO!


IS THERE ANYONE WHO OBJECTS TO TSUKUMO MARRYING MASANARI?

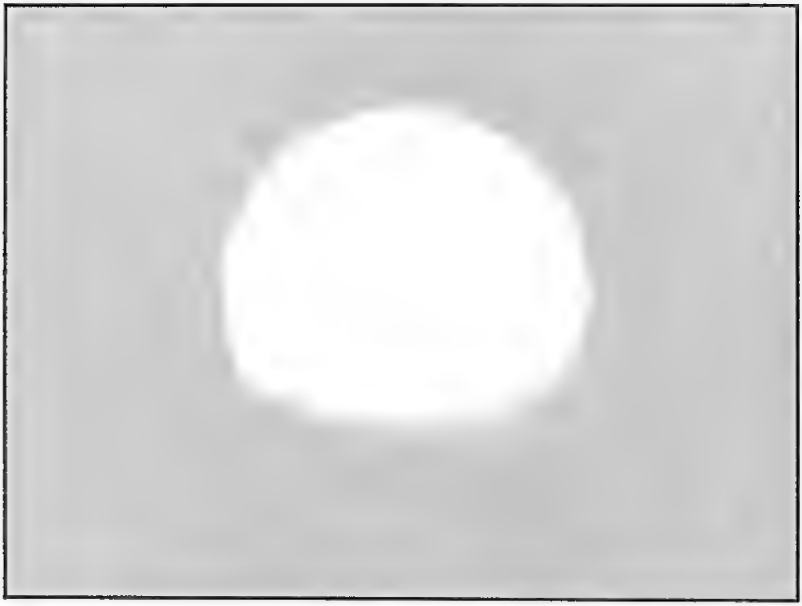
YOU NEED NOT DEFER TO ANYONE ANYMORE. PLEASE TAKE THE SEAT PREPARED FOR MASANARI'S BRIDE. IT'S TIME TO CELEBRATE.

I'M SO HAPPY!
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA

MILORD SAID THE FESTIVITY IS IN THE WAITING. BUT FOR US *SUPPA*, NO MATTER HOW LONG WE WAIT, THE DAY OF THE FESTIVAL CANNOT EVER ARRIVE.
YES?
TSUKUMO.
YES.
EVEN THOUGH IT NEVER WILL, THOUGH, WE MUST NOT NEGLECT PREPARING FOR IT. CONTINUING TO BE READY, KNOWING IT WILL NEVER COME-- THIS IS WHAT *SUPPA* MUST DO.
THAT SAID, IT WAS WORTH THE WAIT, WASN'T IT?

# Chapter On Relinquishing Paths

## No. 1: The Path Taken Upon Surrender-ing to Fate

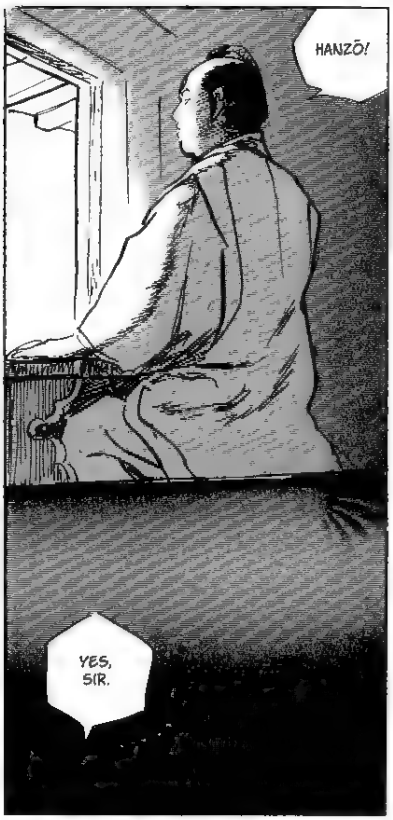


UGYAA
WAAAHH
WAHHH
OH, HEY NOW, HEY NOW.
UNGYAHH
UGYAHH
UGYAHH
WAAAHH
OH DEAR.
BLEH, BOO!!
BLEH, OOOH, BOO!

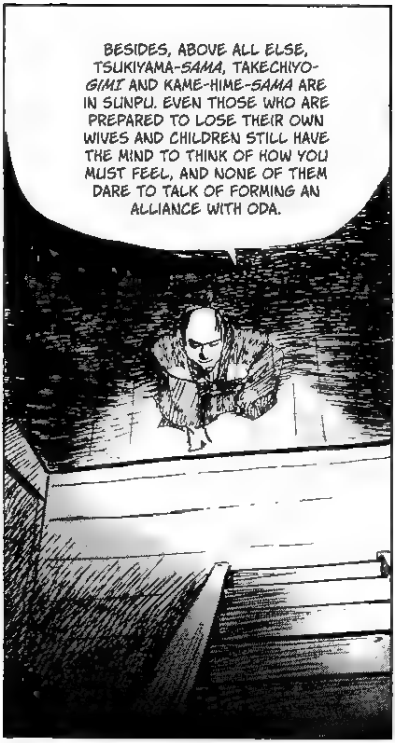
waaah
THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT THEY MEAN BY WAKING A SLEEPING CHILD. I SHOULD'VE LET HIM SLEEP A WHILE LONGER, I SUPPOSE.
BUT... HEH.
TEE HEE HEE. IT'S ALL RIGHT. IT WAS ABOUT TIME HE'D WANT TO NURSE ANYWAY.

EVER SINCE TAKECHIYO WAS BORN, YOU SURE DON'T GO FAR. HO HO HO HO.
BUT WHAT?!
IT'S SO ADORABLE RIGHT HERE.
HA HA HA HA HA.
HOW WELL SAID-- IT WON'T HURT EVEN IF IT GETS IN THE EYES, INDEED.

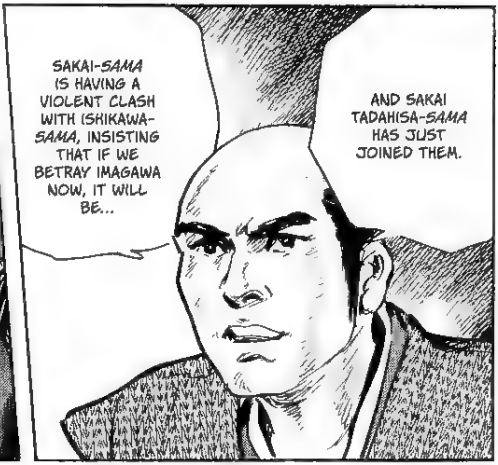
HOW ARE THE MEN IN THE GREAT HALL?
ESPECIALLY SINCE MANY OF THEIR WIVES AND CHILDREN ARE STILL IN SUNPU.
EVEN THOUGH IT IS UNSPOKEN, I SENSE THEY'D ALL RATHER AVOID A WAR WITH IMAGAWA IF POSSIBLE.

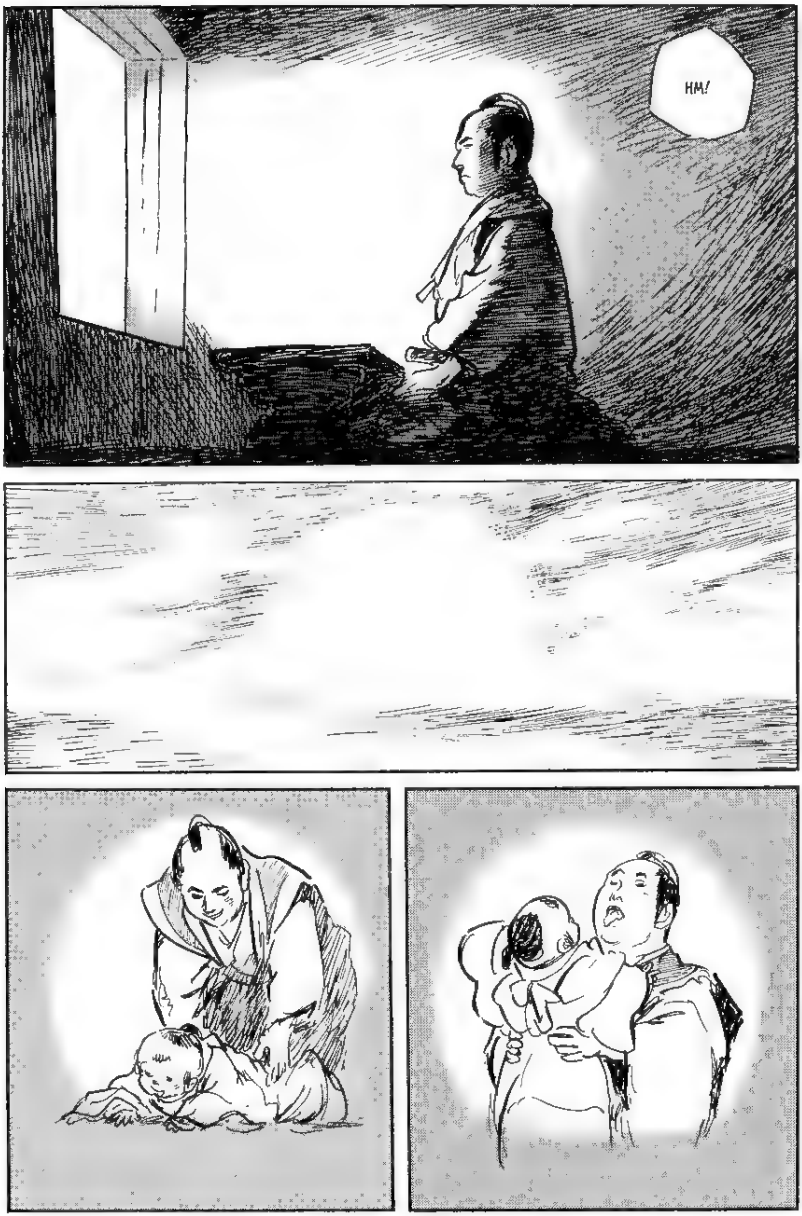

HANZŌ!
YES, SIR.

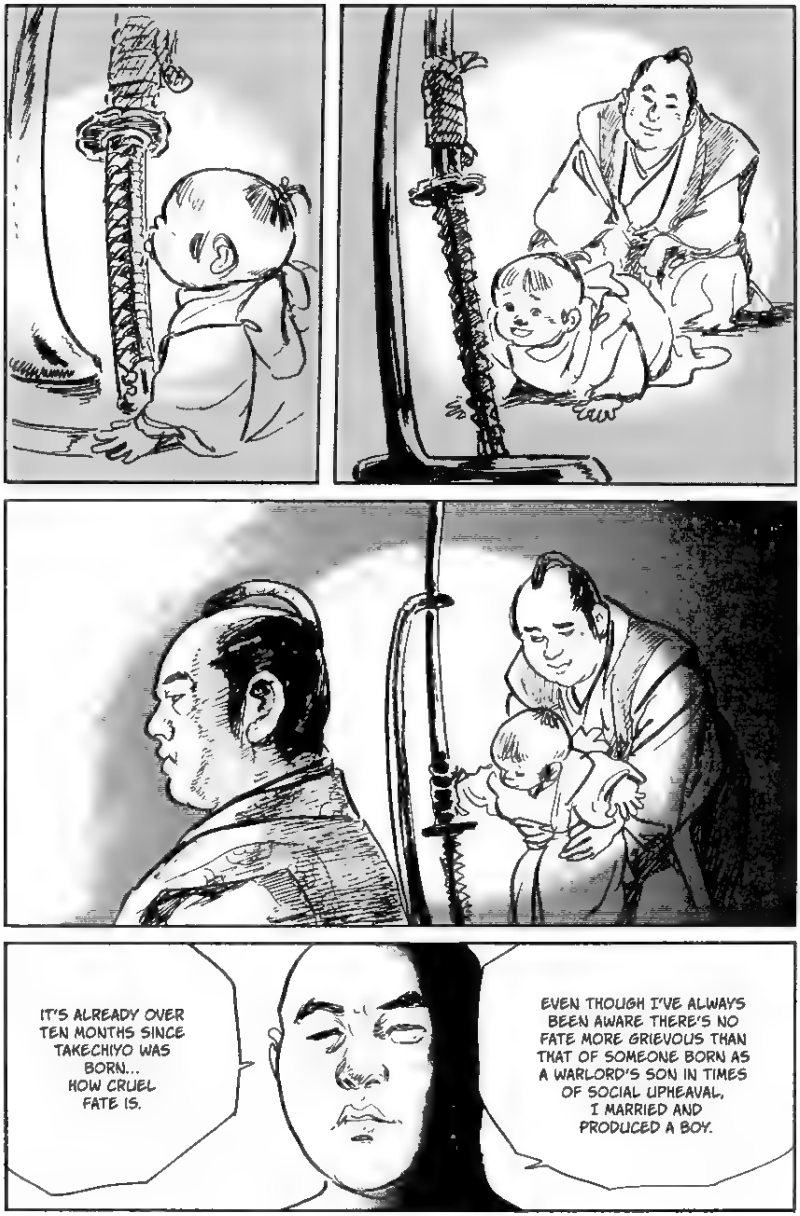
MIZUNO-SAMA IS HAVING A TALK WITH ISHIKAWA KAZUMASA-SAMA IN A SEPARATE CHAMBER.
WHAT ABOUT MY UNCLE?

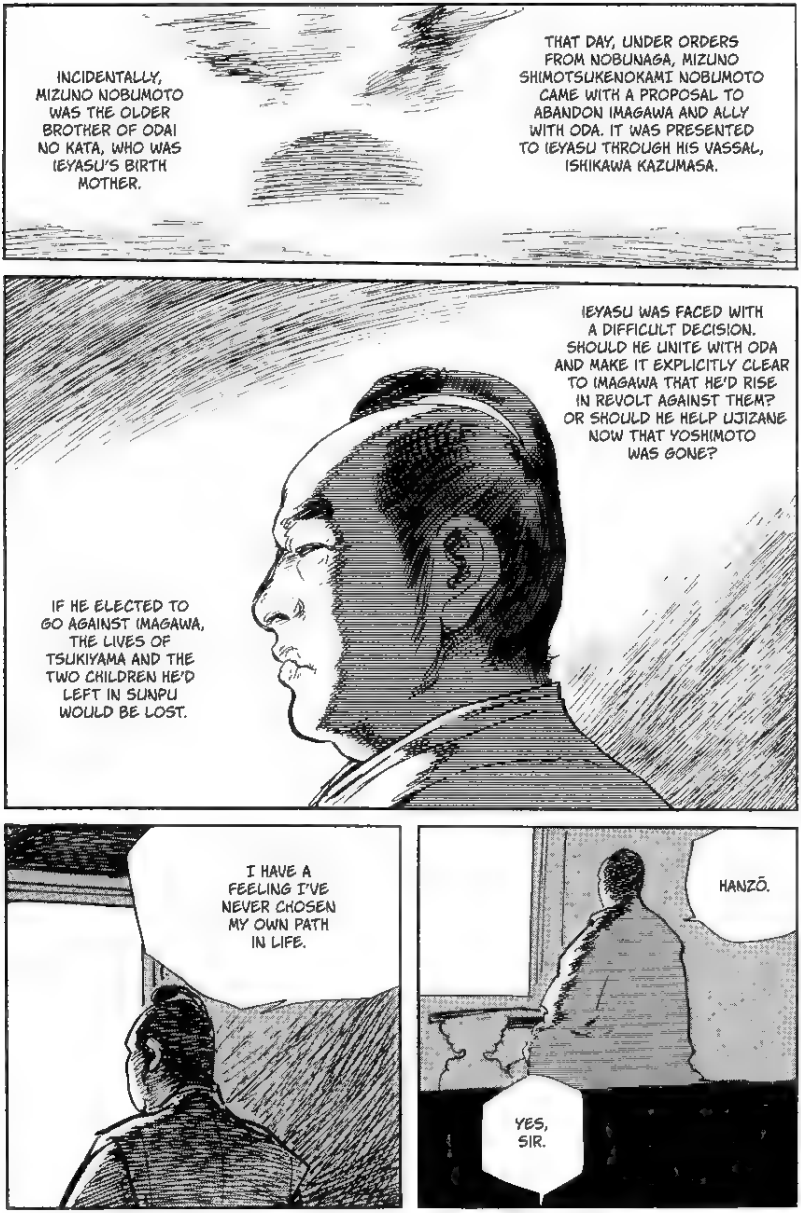

BESIDES, ABOVE ALL ELSE, TSUKIYAMA-SAMA, TAKECHIYO-GIMI AND KAME-HIME-SAMA ARE IN SUNPU. EVEN THOSE WHO ARE PREPARED TO LOSE THEIR OWN WIVES AND CHILDREN STILL HAVE THE MIND TO THINK OF HOW YOU MUST FEEL, AND NONE OF THEM DARE TO TALK OF FORMING AN ALLIANCE WITH ODA.

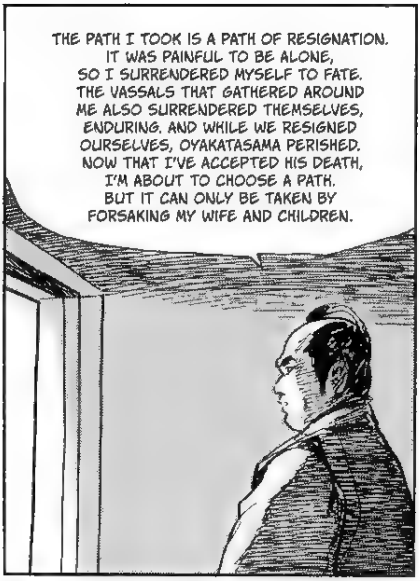
...INJURIOUS TO YOUR NAME, MILORD.

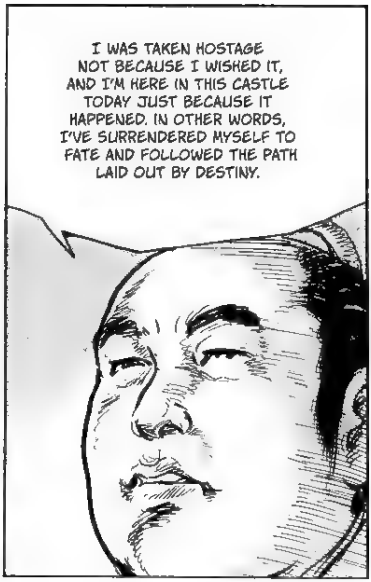

SAKAI-SAMA IS HAVING A VIOLENT CLASH WITH ISHIKAWA-SAMA, INSISTING THAT IF WE BETRAY IMAGAWA NOW, IT WILL BE...
AND SAKAI TADAHISA-SAMA HAS JUST JOINED THEM.


HM!


IT'S ALREADY OVER TEN MONTHS SINCE TAKECHIYO WAS BORN... HOW CRUEL FATE IS.
EVEN THOUGH I'VE ALWAYS BEEN AWARE THERE'S NO FATE MORE GRIEVOUS THAN THAT OF SOMEONE BORN AS A WARLORD'S SON IN TIMES OF SOCIAL UPHEAVAL, I MARRIED AND PRODUCED A BOY.


INCIDENTALLY, MIZUNO NOBUMOTO WAS THE OLDER BROTHER OF ODAI NO KATA, WHO WAS IEYASU'S BIRTH MOTHER.
THAT DAY, UNDER ORDERS FROM NOBUNAGA, MIZUNO SHIMOTSUKENOKAMI NOBUMOTO CAME WITH A PROPOSAL TO ABANDON IMAGAWA AND ALLY WITH ODA. IT WAS PRESENTED TO IEYASU THROUGH HIS VASSAL, ISHIKAWA KAZUMASA.
IEYASU WAS FACED WITH A DIFFICULT DECISION. SHOULD HE UNITE WITH ODA AND MAKE IT EXPLICITLY CLEAR TO IMAGAWA THAT HE'D RISE IN REVOLT AGAINST THEM? OR SHOULD HE HELP UJIZANE NOW THAT YOSHIMOTO WAS GONE?
IF HE ELECTED TO GO AGAINST IMAGAWA, THE LIVES OF TSUKIYAMA AND THE TWO CHILDREN HE'D LEFT IN SUNPU WOULD BE LOST.
I HAVE A FEELING I'VE NEVER CHOSEN MY OWN PATH IN LIFE.
HANZŌ.
YES, SIR.

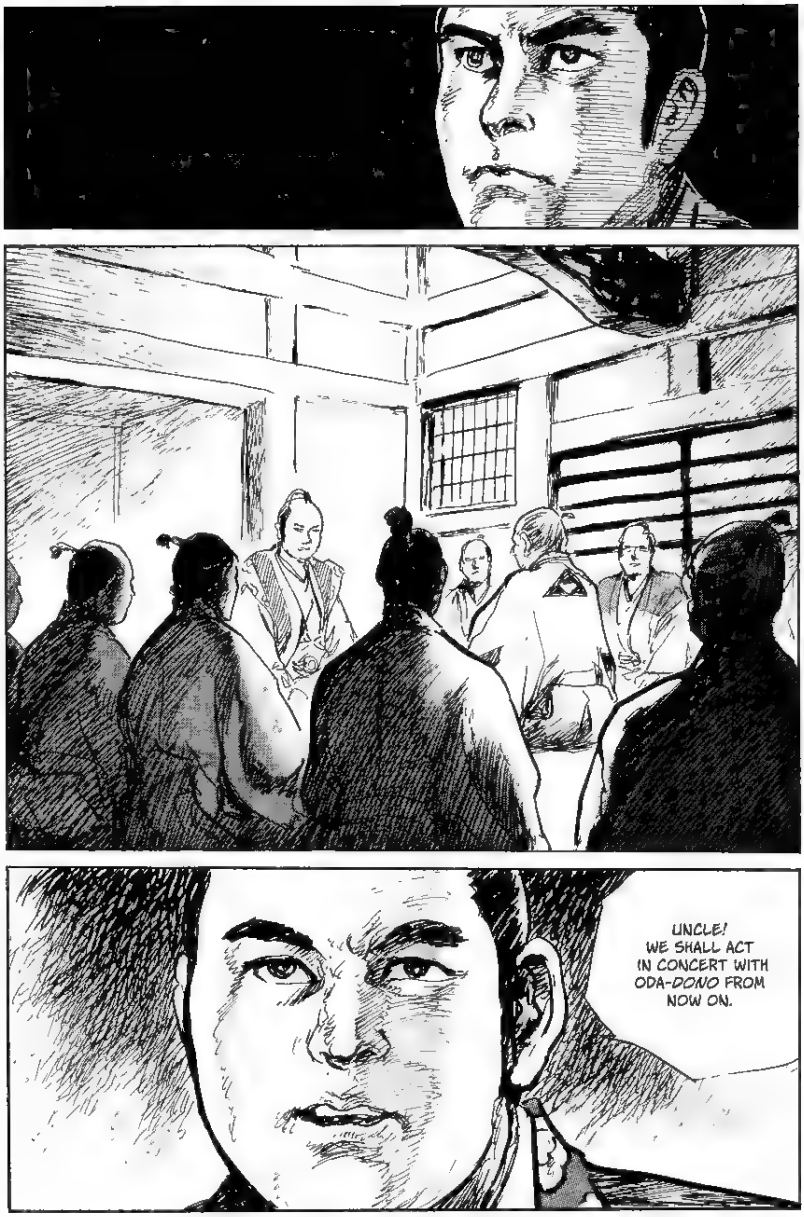

THE PATH I TOOK IS A PATH OF RESIGNATION. IT WAS PAINFUL TO BE ALONE, SO I SURRENDERED MYSELF TO FATE. THE VASSALS THAT GATHERED AROUND ME ALSO SURRENDERED THEMSELVES, ENDURING. AND WHILE WE RESIGNED OURSELVES, OYAKATASAMA PERISHED. NOW THAT I'VE ACCEPTED HIS DEATH, I'M ABOUT TO CHOOSE A PATH. BUT IT CAN ONLY BE TAKEN BY FORSAKING MY WIFE AND CHILDREN.


I WAS TAKEN HOSTAGE NOT BECAUSE I WISHED IT, AND I'M HERE IN THIS CASTLE TODAY JUST BECAUSE IT HAPPENED. IN OTHER WORDS, I'VE SURRENDERED MYSELF TO FATE AND FOLLOWED THE PATH LAID OUT BY DESTINY.

...I CANNOT PLACE MY CLAN AT RISK BY JOINING FORCES WITH A MAN LIKE UJIZANE.

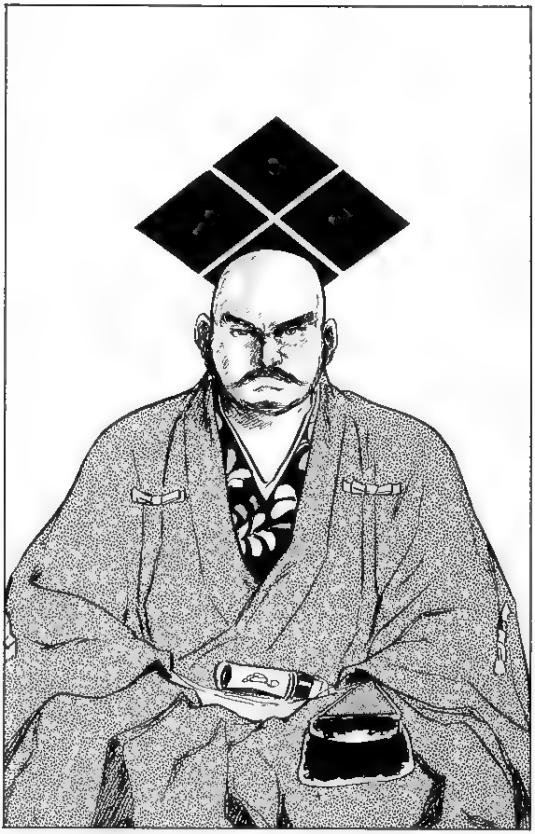
BESIDES...
SO, I SHALL RELIN-QUISH.

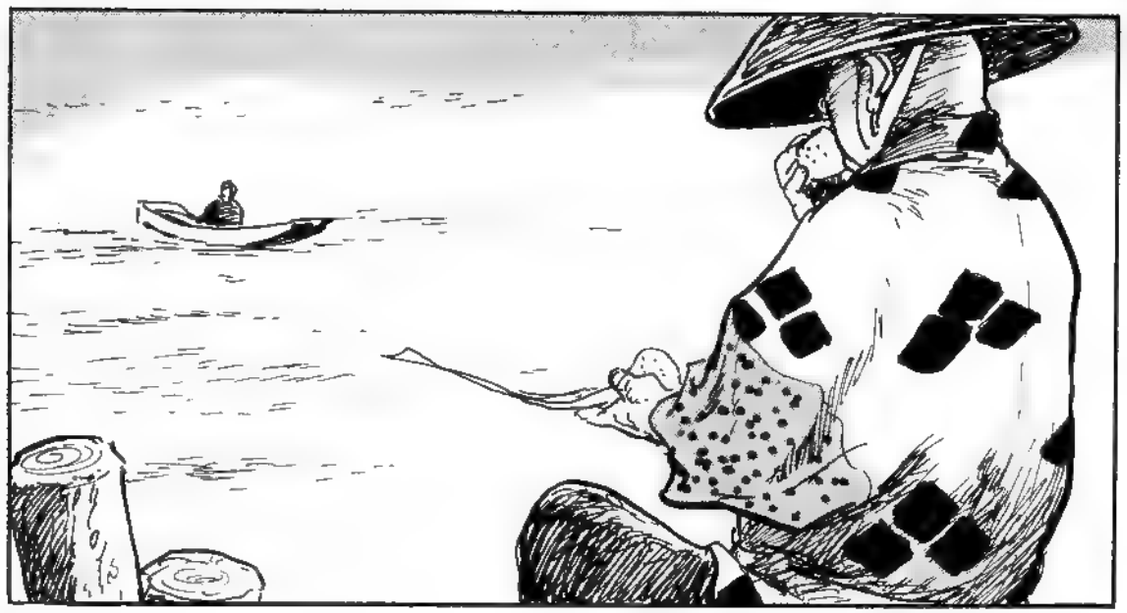
I CANNOT HELP BUT FEEL MY WHOLE LIFE HAS BEEN BUILT UPON LETTING THINGS GO.
IT'S ALSO A PATH OF RESIGNATION.

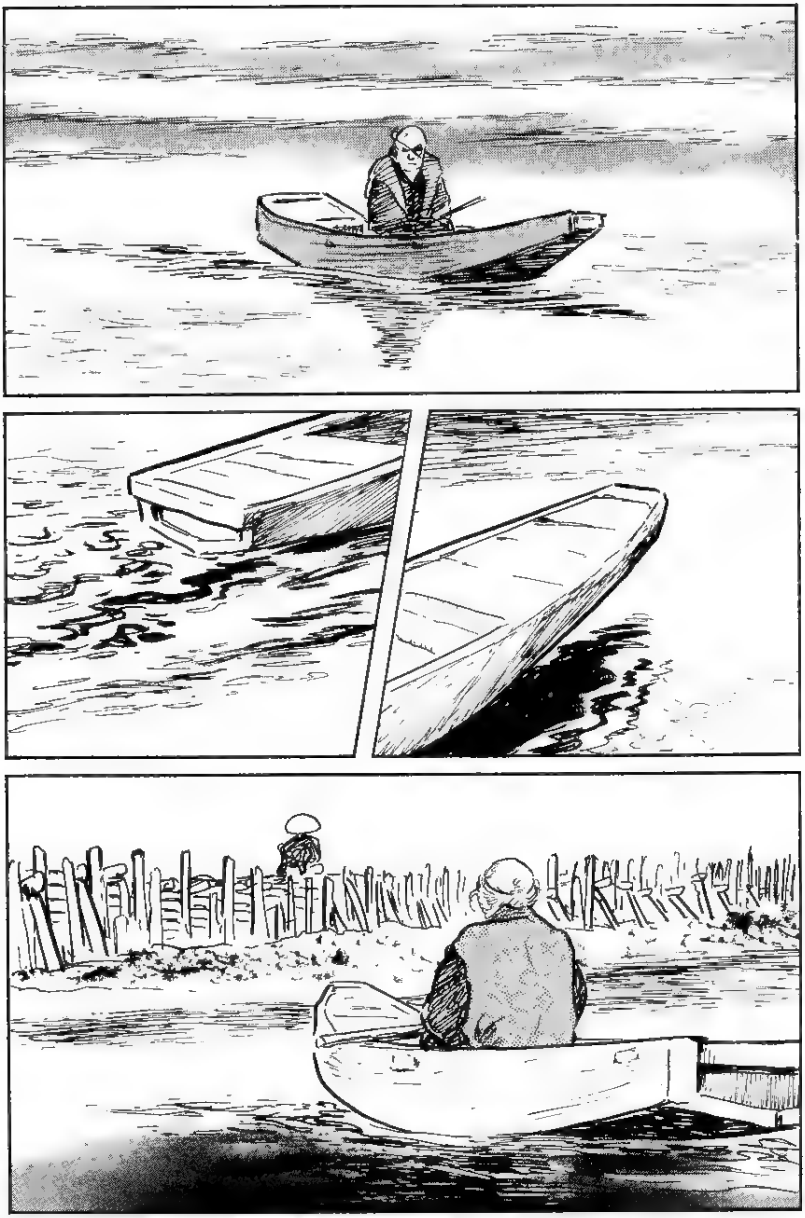

UNCLE! WE SHALL ACT IN CONCERT WITH ODA-*DONO* FROM NOW ON.

# Chapter On Relinquishing Paths

## No. 2: The Man who Altered the Flow of the River

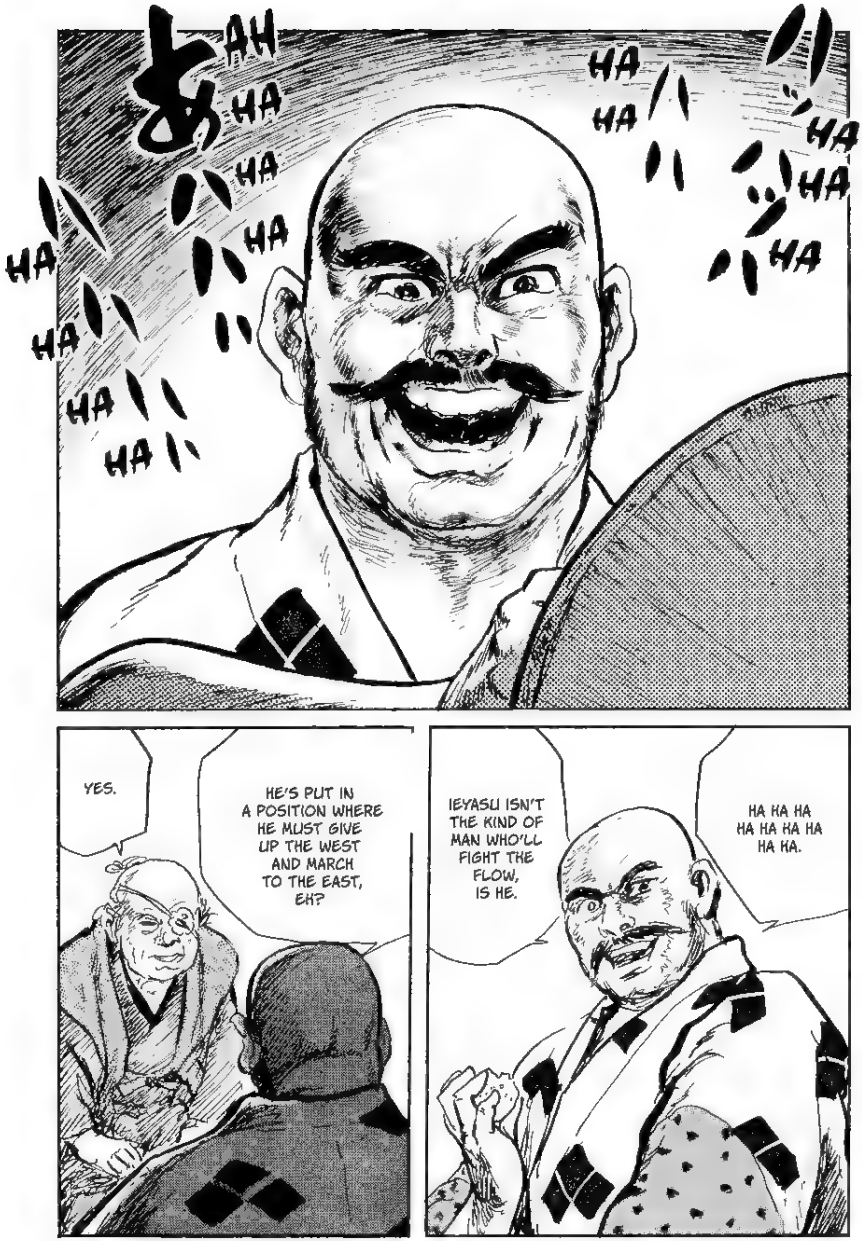


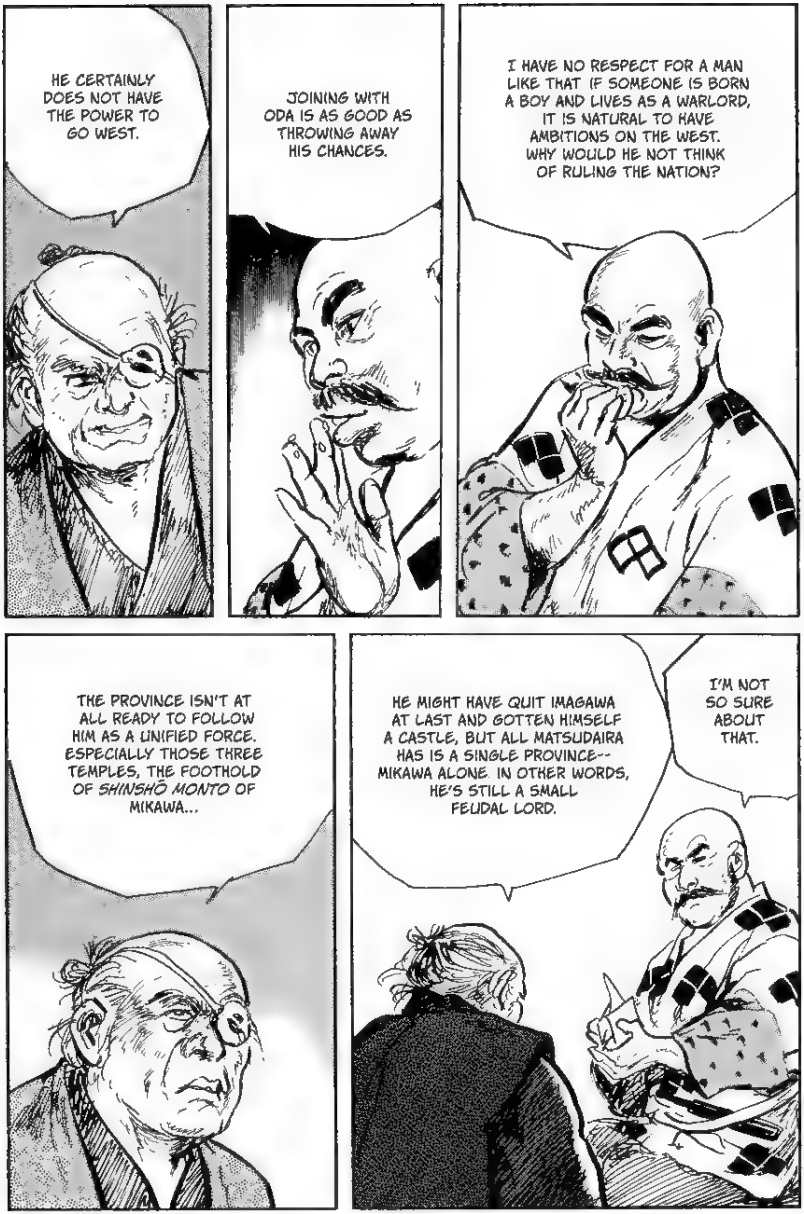




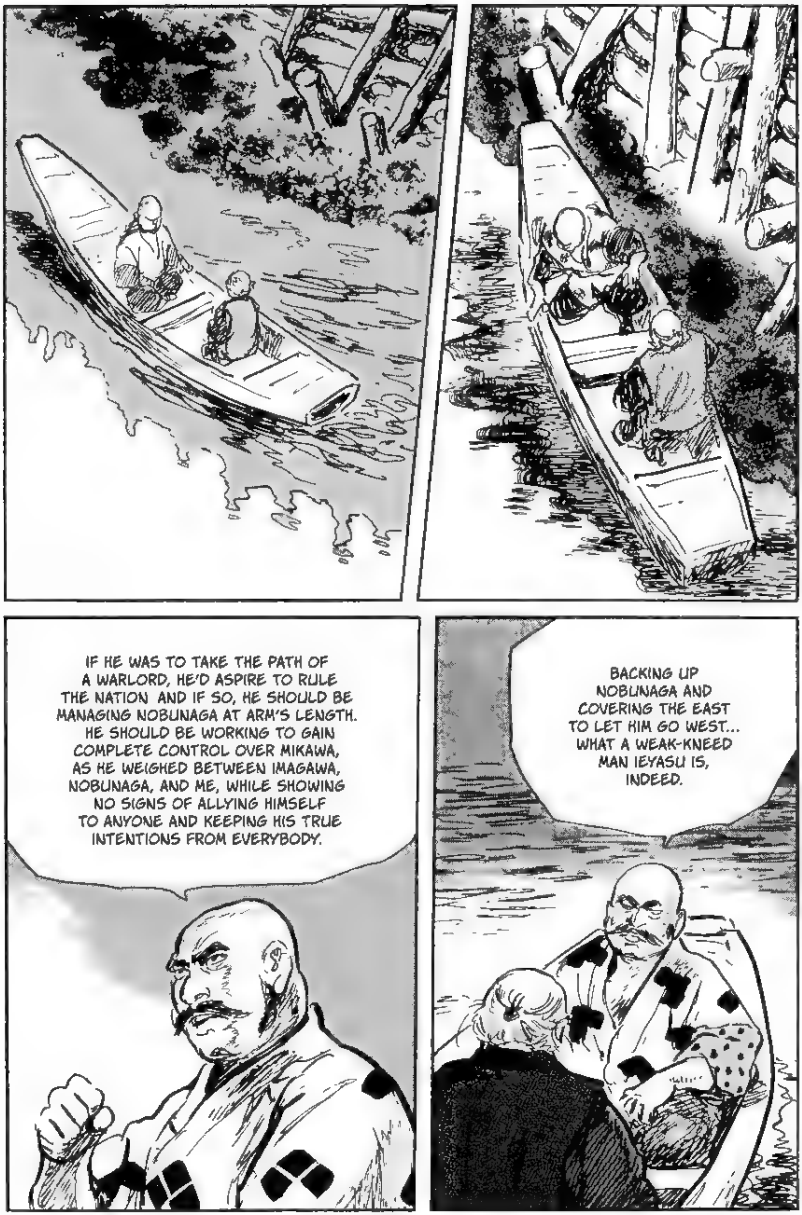
TOP
MM.
I HAVE JUST RETURNED.

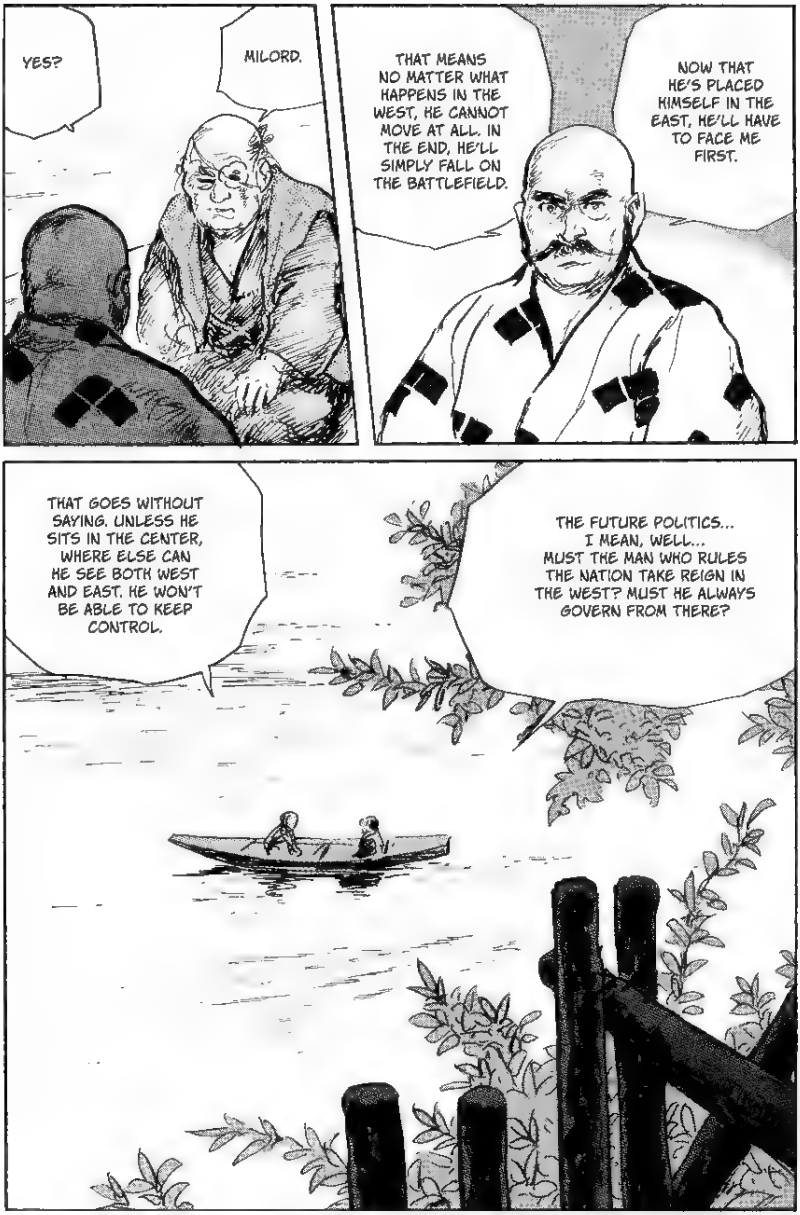
IEYASU?
UNDER NOBUNAGA'S ORDERS, MIZUNO NOBUMOTO WENT TO PERSUADE IEYASU...
IEYASU HAS AGREED TO MAKE PEACE WITH NOBUNAGA.
MIZUNO OF KARIYA IS NOW IN OKAZAKI, KUH? HMPH.
MOTOYASU TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO CHANGE HIS NAME UPON ENTERING OKAZAKI CASTLE.

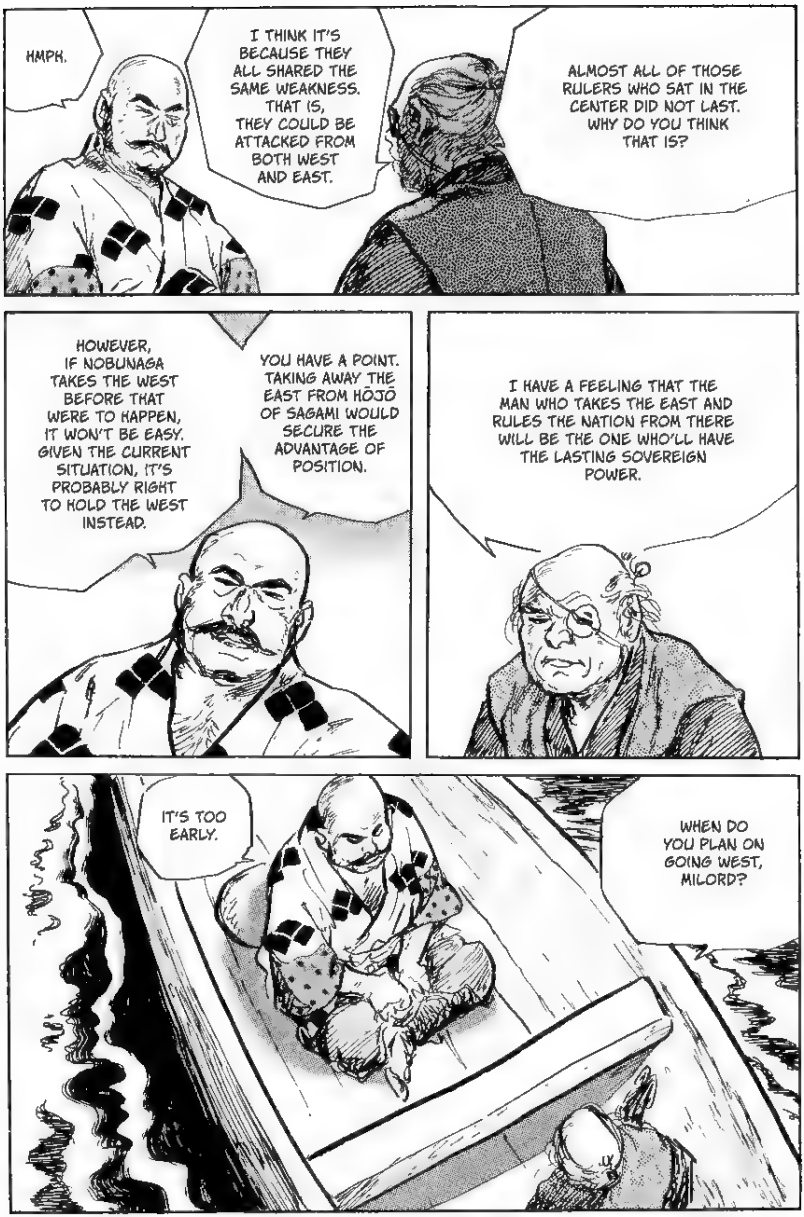

あ AH HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA
YES.
HE'S PUT IN A POSITION WHERE HE MUST GIVE UP THE WEST AND MARCH TO THE EAST, EH?
IEYASU ISN'T THE KIND OF MAN WHO'LL FIGHT THE FLOW, IS HE.
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.

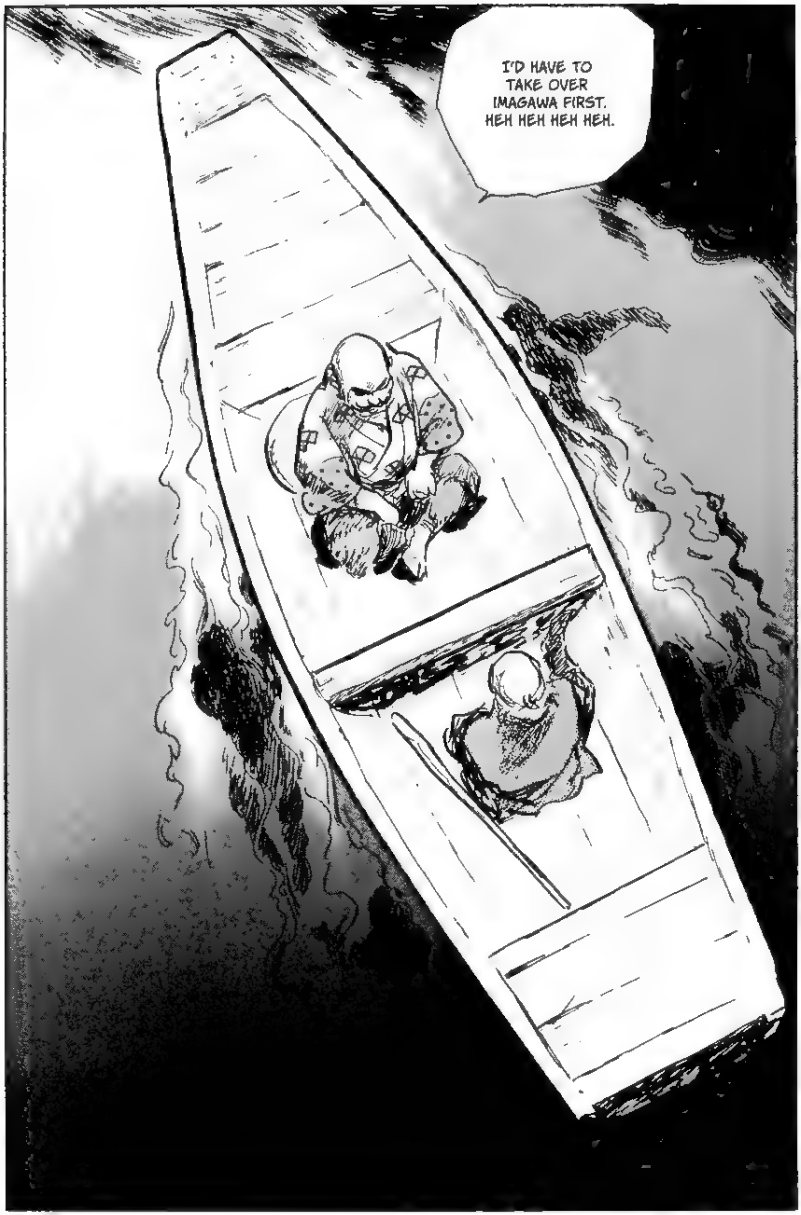

HE CERTAINLY DOES NOT HAVE THE POWER TO GO WEST.
JOINING WITH ODA IS AS GOOD AS THROWING AWAY HIS CHANCES.
I HAVE NO RESPECT FOR A MAN LIKE THAT. IF SOMEONE IS BORN A BOY AND LIVES AS A WARLORD, IT IS NATURAL TO HAVE AMBITIONS ON THE WEST. WHY WOULD HE NOT THINK OF RULING THE NATION?
THE PROVINCE ISN'T AT ALL READY TO FOLLOW HIM AS A UNIFIED FORCE. ESPECIALLY THOSE THREE TEMPLES, THE FOOTHOLD OF SHINSHŌ MONTO OF MIKAWA...
HE MIGHT HAVE QUIT IMAGAWA AT LAST AND GOTTEN HIMSELF A CASTLE, BUT ALL MATSUDAIRA HAS IS A SINGLE PROVINCE-- MIKAWA ALONE. IN OTHER WORDS, HE'S STILL A SMALL FEUDAL LORD.
I'M NOT SO SURE ABOUT THAT.

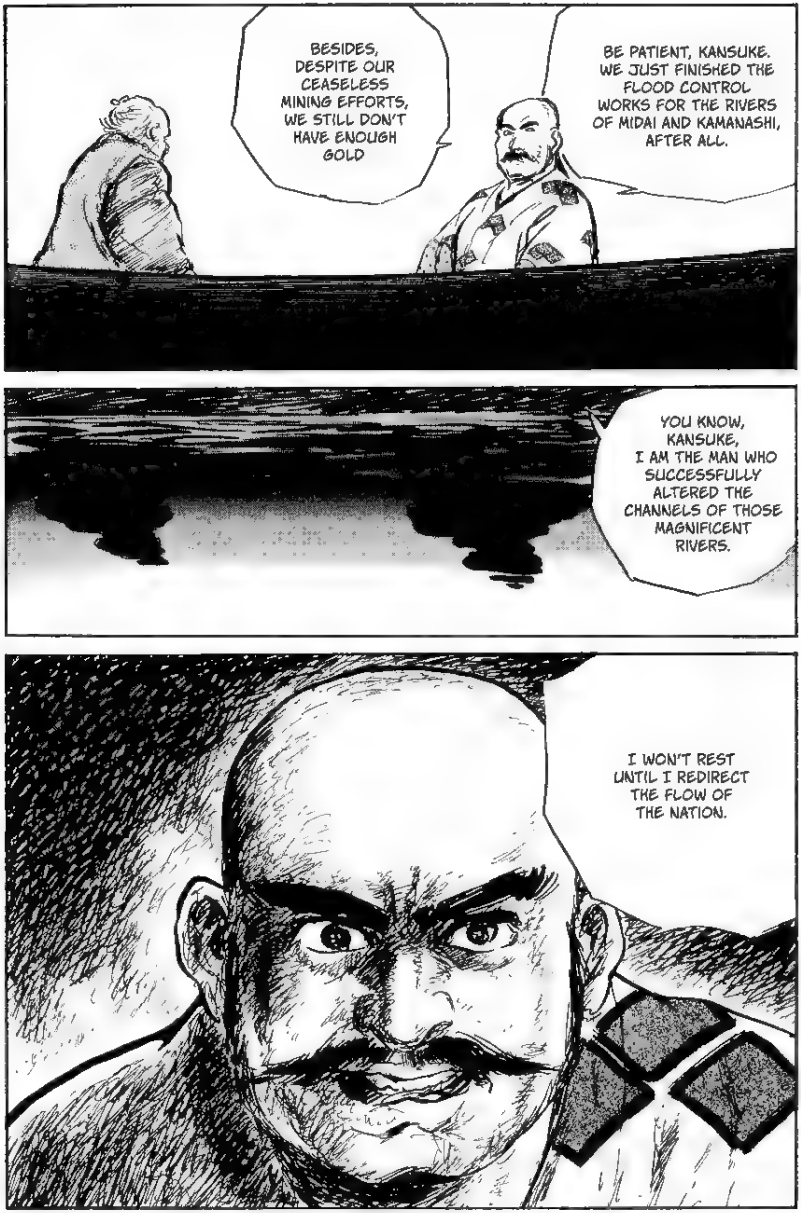
BUT IF HE SUCCEEDS IN GOVERNING THEM, HE'LL GAIN POWER.
NAMELY, THE NODERA HONSHŌJI TEMPLE, THE HARISAKI SHŌMANJI TEMPLE AND THE SASAKI JŌGŌJI TEMPLE-- THEY ARE NOT HAPPY TO HAVE IEYASU AS THEIR LORD.
HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THESE IKKŌSHŌ FOLKS WILL DETERMINE THE FUTURE OF MIKAWA, I BELIEVE.
YES.


IF HE WAS TO TAKE THE PATH OF A WARLORD, HE'D ASPIRE TO RULE THE NATION AND IF SO, HE SHOULD BE MANAGING NOBUNAGA AT ARM'S LENGTH. HE SHOULD BE WORKING TO GAIN COMPLETE CONTROL OVER MIKAWA, AS HE WEIGHED BETWEEN IMAGAWA, NOBUNAGA, AND ME, WHILE SHOWING NO SIGNS OF ALLYING HIMSELF TO ANYONE AND KEEPING HIS TRUE INTENTIONS FROM EVERYBODY.
BACKING UP NOBUNAGA AND COVERING THE EAST TO LET HIM GO WEST... WHAT A WEAK-KNEED MAN IEYASU IS, INDEED.


YES?
MILORD.
THAT MEANS NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS IN THE WEST, HE CANNOT MOVE AT ALL. IN THE END, HE'LL SIMPLY FALL ON THE BATTLEFIELD.
NOW THAT HE'S PLACED HIMSELF IN THE EAST, HE'LL HAVE TO FACE ME FIRST.
THAT GOES WITHOUT SAYING. UNLESS HE SITS IN THE CENTER, WHERE ELSE CAN HE SEE BOTH WEST AND EAST. HE WON'T BE ABLE TO KEEP CONTROL.
THE FUTURE POLITICS... I MEAN, WELL... MUST THE MAN WHO RULES THE NATION TAKE REIGN IN THE WEST? MUST HE ALWAYS GOVERN FROM THERE?


HMPH.
I THINK IT'S BECAUSE THEY ALL SHARED THE SAME WEAKNESS. THAT IS, THEY COULD BE ATTACKED FROM BOTH WEST AND EAST.
ALMOST ALL OF THOSE RULERS WHO SAT IN THE CENTER DID NOT LAST. WHY DO YOU THINK THAT IS?
HOWEVER, IF NOBUNAGA TAKES THE WEST BEFORE THAT WERE TO HAPPEN, IT WON'T BE EASY. GIVEN THE CURRENT SITUATION, IT'S PROBABLY RIGHT TO HOLD THE WEST INSTEAD.
YOU HAVE A POINT. TAKING AWAY THE EAST FROM HŌJŌ OF SAGAMI WOULD SECURE THE ADVANTAGE OF POSITION.
I HAVE A FEELING THAT THE MAN WHO TAKES THE EAST AND RULES THE NATION FROM THERE WILL BE THE ONE WHO'LL HAVE THE LASTING SOVEREIGN POWER.
IT'S TOO EARLY.
WHEN DO YOU PLAN ON GOING WEST, MILORD?


I'D HAVE TO TAKE OVER IMAGAWA FIRST. HEH HEH HEH HEH.

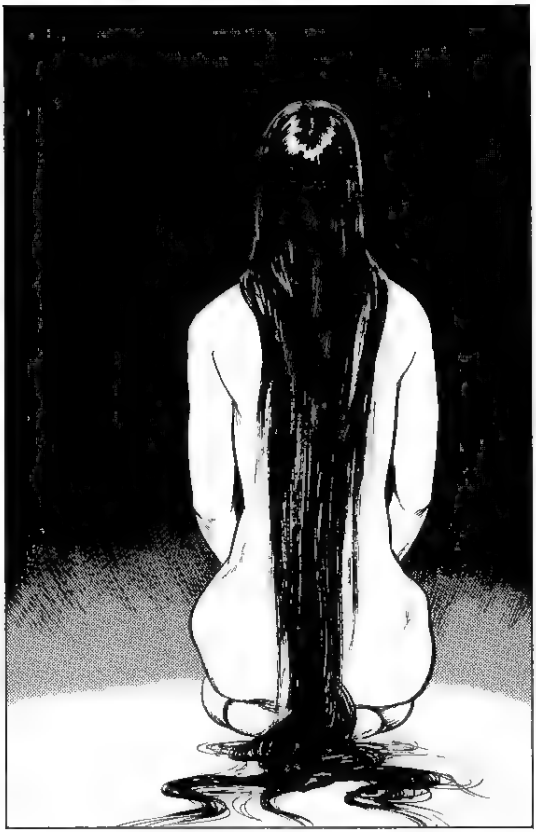

BESIDES, DESPITE OUR CEASELESS MINING EFFORTS, WE STILL DON'T HAVE ENOUGH GOLD
BE PATIENT, KANSUKE. WE JUST FINISHED THE FLOOD CONTROL WORKS FOR THE RIVERS OF MIDAI AND KAMANASHI, AFTER ALL.
YOU KNOW, KANSUKE, I AM THE MAN WHO SUCCESSFULLY ALTERED THE CHANNELS OF THOSE MAGNIFICENT RIVERS.
I WON'T REST UNTIL I REDIRECT THE FLOW OF THE NATION.

HMPH, THAT'S A GOOD IDEA.
IKKŌ-IKKI, HUH?
LET'S LIGHT SOME FIRES. IF THOSE THREE TEMPLES TURN ON HIM AND GIVE RISE TO IKKŌ-IKKI, HE WILL HAVE NO MIND TO THINK OF THE WEST OR THE EAST.
FOR THE TIME BEING, WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT IEYASU?
CAN YOU?
IMAGAWA HAS HIS WIFE AND SON AT THE MOMENT, I BELIEVE. IF WE SHOW IEYASU THE WAY TO RESCUE THEM...
LET'S ALSO PUT HIM IN OUR DEBT.
RIGHT. LET'S GET GOING.
LEAVE IT TO ME.

AND TRANSFORM IT TO RULE THE NATION, HUH?
...BENDING IT UNTIL IT FALLS UNDER TAKEDA'S CONTROL...
JUST LIKE THE RIVER, CHANGE THE FLOW SLOWLY BUT SURELY...
IN EIROKU YEAR 3 (1560 A.D.), HAVING COMPLETED THE FLOOD CONTROL PROJECTS FOR THE RIVERS OF KAMANASHI, FUEFUKI, AND MIDAI, TAKEDA SHINGEN LAUGHED AS HE SCHEMED TO RULE THE NATION ON THE BANKS OF THE KAMANASHI, NEAR RYŪŌ. HE DID SO IN A MANNER BEFITTING A MAN KNOWN AS THE TIGER OF KAI.
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
HE WAS THIRTY-NINE YEARS OLD.

# Chapter On Relinquishing Paths

## No. 3: Last Gasp Scheme



ああ…
ああああ…

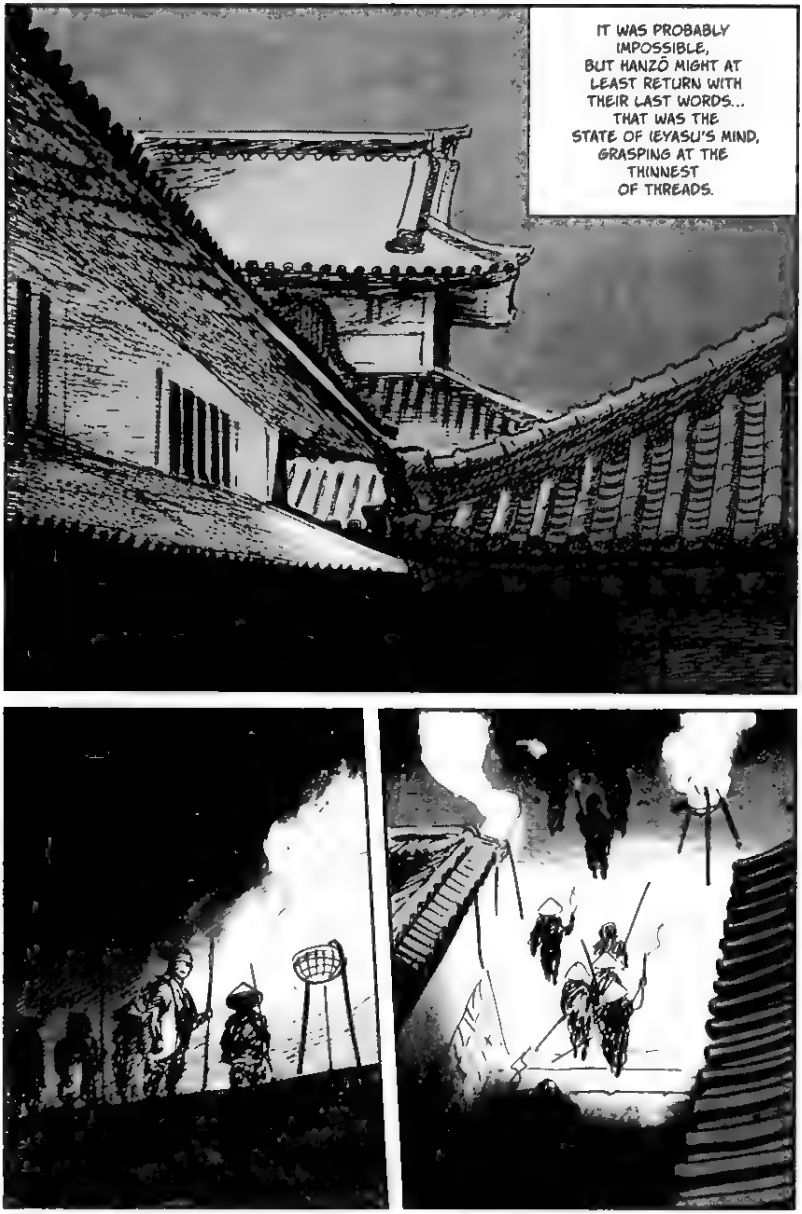
AFTER
YOSHIMOTO
PASSED AWAY,
HYSTERIA
TOOK HOLD
AT IMAGAWA

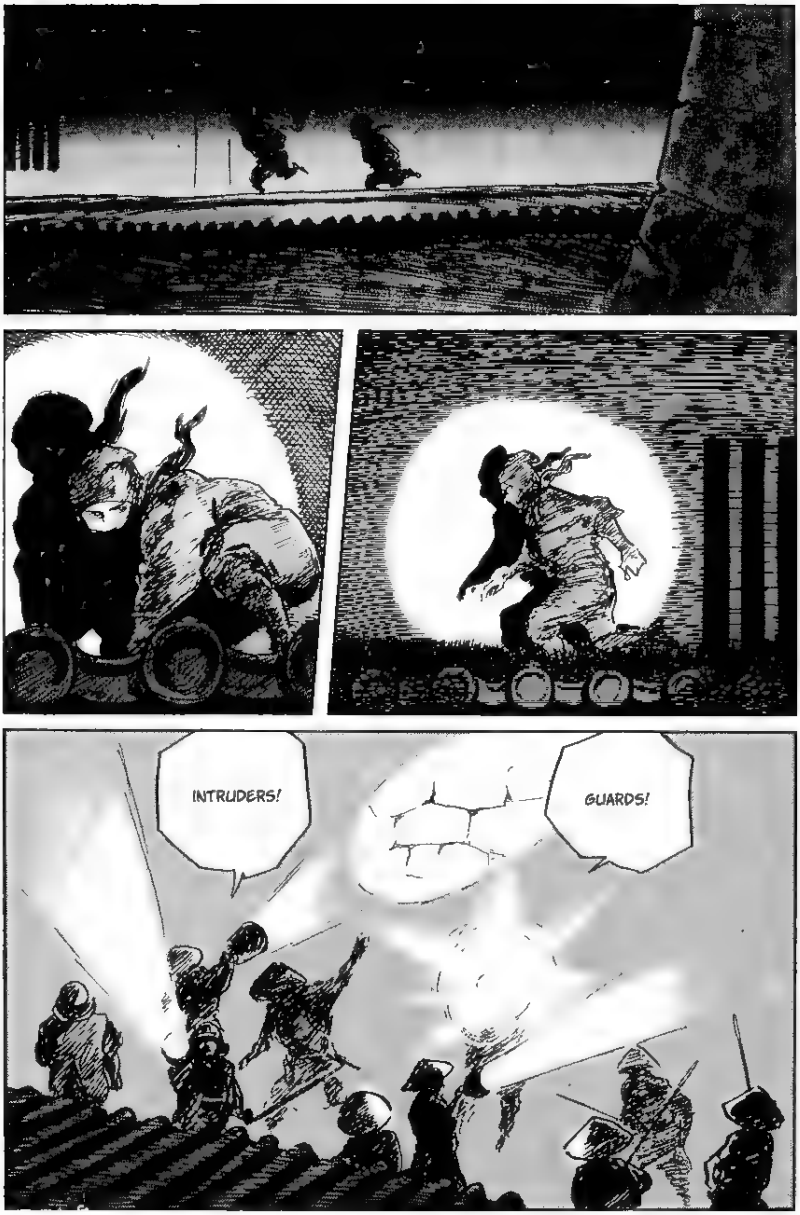
BECAUSE FRIGHTENED UJIIANE BEGAN TO TAKE THE WIVES AND CHILDREN OF DISLOYAL GENERALS TO THE RYONENJI TEMPLE IN THE CASTLE TOWN OF YOSHIDA WHERE HE SLAUGHTERED THEM ALL. THOSE GENERALS WERE MOSTLY FROM THE AREAS OF OMINE, NAGASHINO AND NODA
NO DOUBT IT REACHED THE EARS OF IEYASU IN OKAZAKI
殺せ
KILL!
KILL 'EM!
ころせ

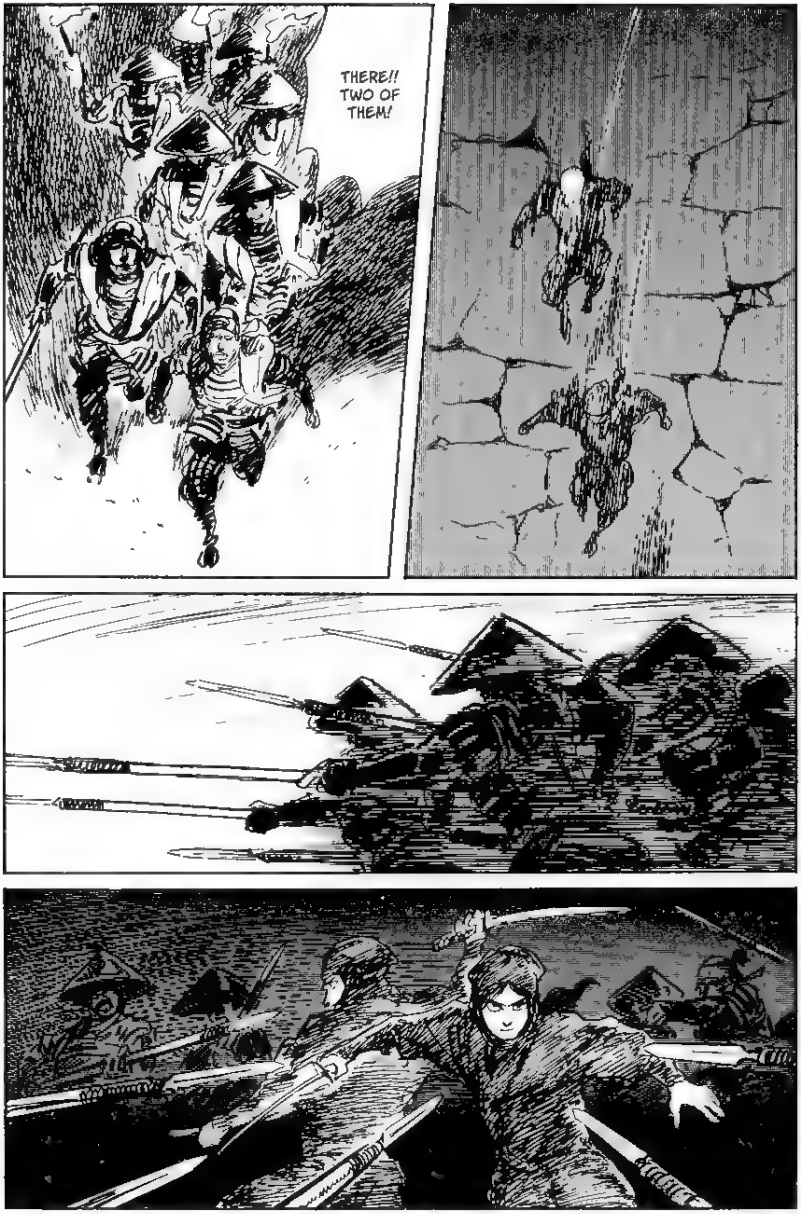
AHH
IT WAS... JUST A DREAM.

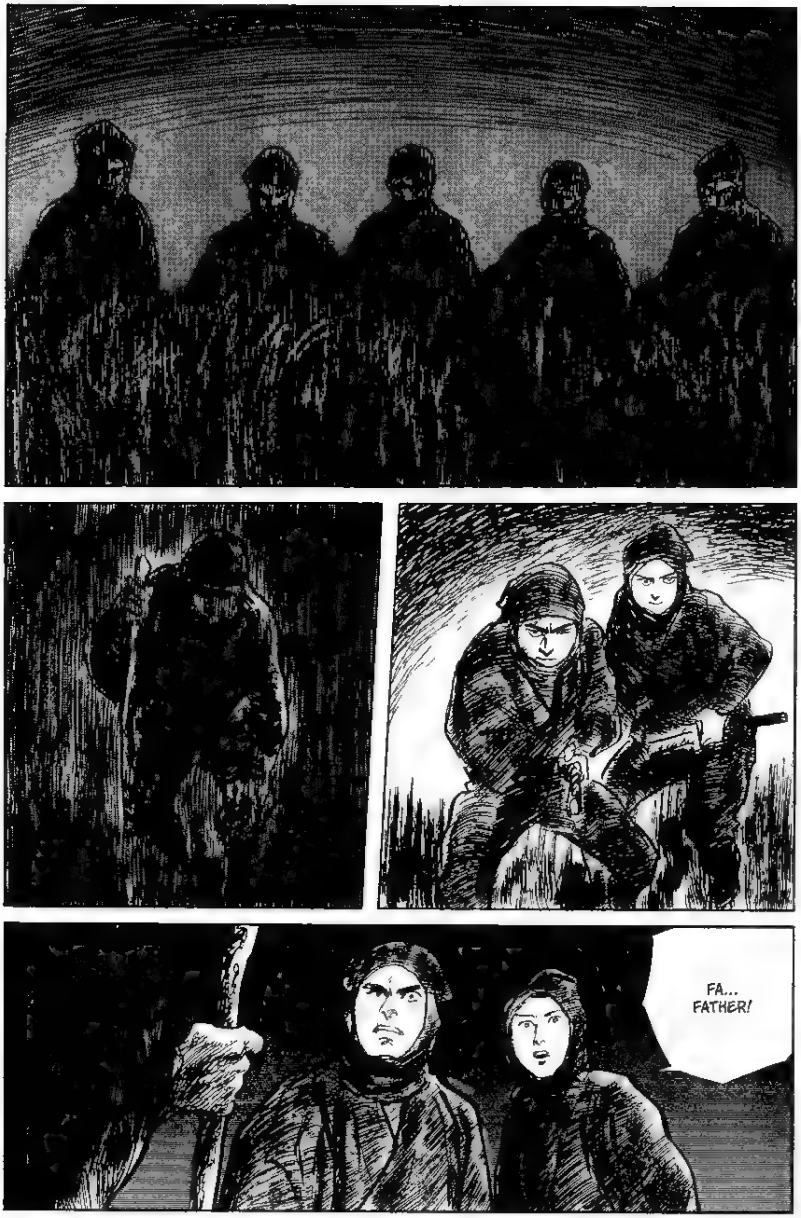
I WANT TO SAVE THEM... IF I CAN.
IN THIS TURBULENT AGE, ALL *SAMURAI* ARE GIVEN LIFE ONLY TO FIGHT, BUT STILL, IT IS PAINFUL TO HAVE OUR WIVES AND CHILDREN USED AS HOSTAGES.
WHOOO
TEARING AWAY A BLEEDING HEART... THIS MUST BE WHAT IT FEELS LIKE.
HOW SEVERE HIS PAIN MUST BE INSIDE.
THE STRONGER THE MAN, THE GREATER HIS SUFFERING MUST BE. A WEAK ONE LIKE ME MIGHT GIVE THEM UP AS LOST-- AND YET, HOPING BEYOND HOPE, HE WOULD STILL HUSTLE TO TRY TO RESCUE THEM. A STRONG MAN, ON THE OTHER HAND, WOULD SHOW NO SIGN OF HIS ANGUISH.
I'M COUNTING ON YOU!!
HANZŌ! TSUKUMO!

PLEASE SAVE THEM!
PLEASE SAVE TSUKIYAMA, TAKECHIYO, AND KAME...
BUT... EVEN THOUGH I HAVE... IF AT ALL POSSIBLE...
I'VE GIVEN UP HOPE.
IEYASU'S LAST CHANCE RESTED ON HANZÔ AND TSUKUMO, WHO SHOULD HAVE ENTERED IMAGAWA'S TERRITORY BY THEN.
BUT HOW? HOW COULD EVEN HANZÔ SAVE THEM? AFTER ALL, HE MUST STEAL AWAY A WOMAN WHO COULDN'T RUN AND AN INFANT WHO COULD HARDLY WALK...


IT WAS PROBABLY IMPOSSIBLE, BUT HANZŌ MIGHT AT LEAST RETURN WITH THEIR LAST WORDS... THAT WAS THE STATE OF IEYASU'S MIND, GRASPING AT THE THINNEST OF THREADS.


INTRUDERS!
GUARDS!

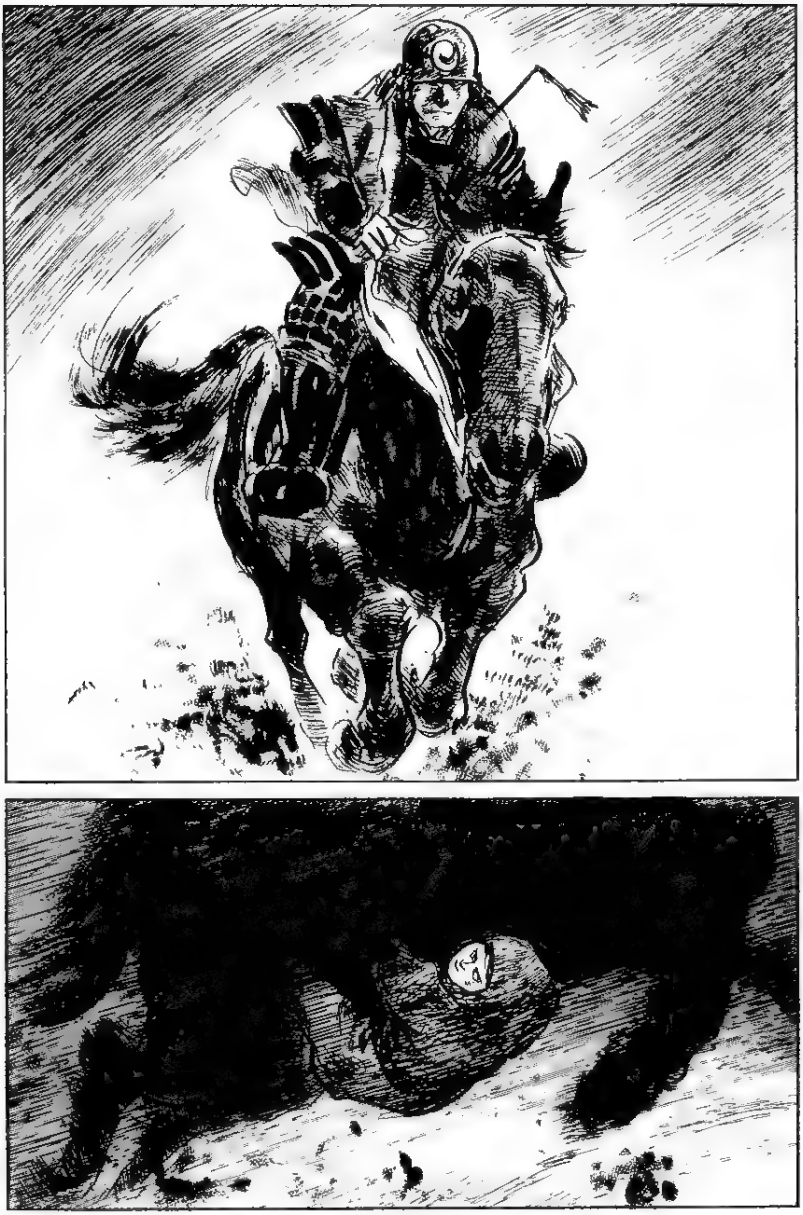

THERE!! TWO OF THEM!


FA...
FATHER!

TO TAKE OVER, OF COURSE.
WHY ARE YOU INSIDE IMAGAWA'S TERRITORY WITH YOUR MEN?
HANZŌ-DONO, I WAS PREPARED TO SAVE YOU IN CASE YOU NEEDED HELP.
NO NEED TO SQUINT AT ME LIKE THAT.
WE'VE BEEN LOOKING INTO THAT, YOU SEE.

BUT YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO.
YOU MUST BE HOPING TO RESCUE LADY TSUKIYAMA AND TAKECHIYO.
WHA... WHAT IS... SO RECKLESS?
DON'T MAKE ANY RECKLESS ATTEMPTS, HANZŌ-DONO.
...
...
...
IT WON'T BE EASY TO BREAK IN.
IMAGAWA MAY BE ROTTING, BUT IT'S STILL A FIGHTING CARP. THERE ARE MANY MEN LOYAL TO THE CLAN, AND ALL THE STRATEGIC POINTS ARE WELL GUARDED.
ATTACK UDONO NAGATERU, THE LORD OF MIKAWA NISHIGOORI CASTLE, AND TAKE HOSTAGES.
NOW, SIT. LET ME GIVE YOU AN IDEA.

BESIDES, NOW THAT YOSHIMOTO IS GONE, UJIZANE LOOKS TO NAGATERU THE MOST.
NAGATERU'S WIFE IS A SISTER OF YOSHIMOTO. THAT MEANS, SHE IS UJIZANE'S AUNT. THEIR SONS, UJINAGA AND UJITSUGU, ARE HIS COUSINS.
EXCHANGE YOUR HOSTAGES WITH LADY TSUKIYAMA AND TAKECHIYO, THAT'S ALL YOU NEED TO DO.
THAT SHOULD GIVE YOU ENOUGH TO SEE WHAT I'M GETTING AT. FWAA HA HA HA HA HA.
TSUKUMO! YOUR FATHER IS... SCARY. HE IS A FORMIDABLE MAN, INDEED.
HM...
LET'S CALL IT A LAST GASP SCHEME, EH?



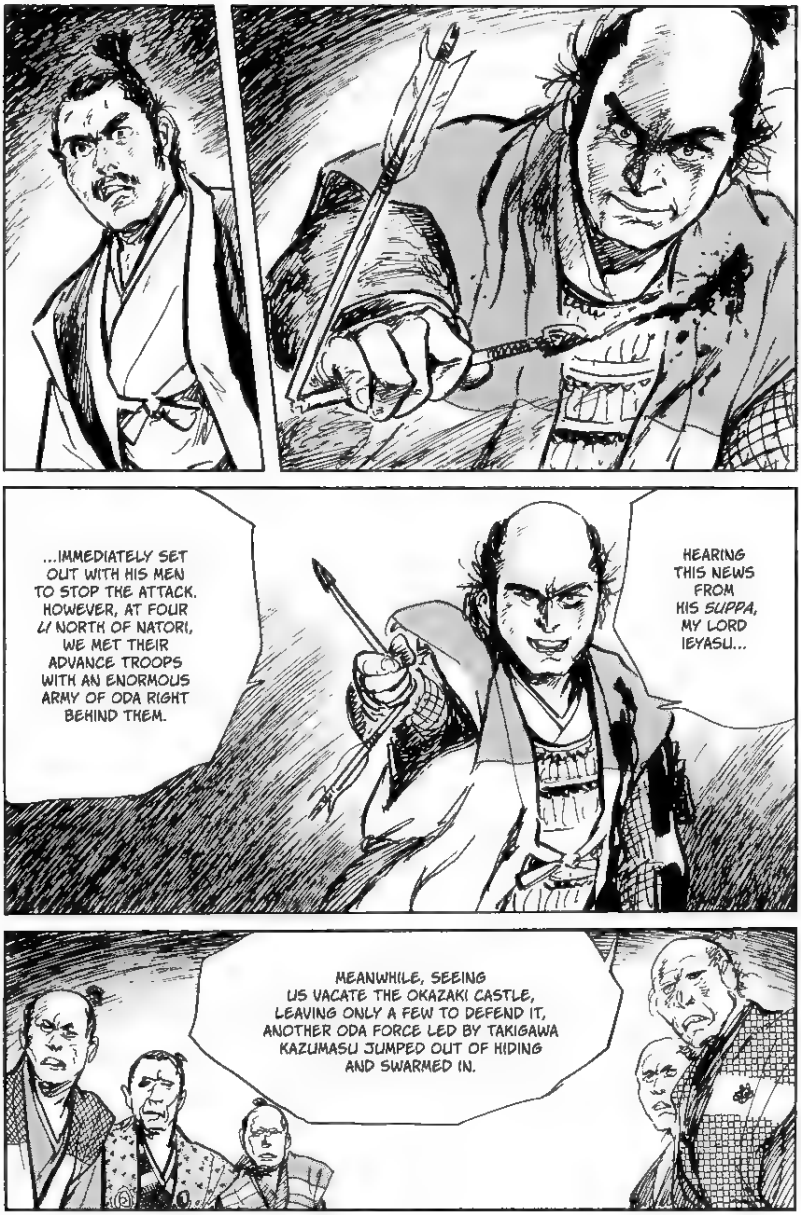
THIS IS
HATTORI HANZŌ
MASANARI
THE VASSAL OF
MATSUDAIRA
IEYASU!

I'VE COME WITH AN URGENT MESSAGE FOR UDONO NAGATERU-SAMA.
...FIGHTING HEAD-ON AGAINST ODA!
WE, THE MATSUDAIRA FORCES, ARE CURRENTLY FOUR // NORTH OF THE MOUNTAIN OF NATORI...

PLEASE ALLOW ME AN AUDIENCE WITH HIM!
PARDON ME FOR NOT DISMOUNTING! HYAAH!

NAGATERU-SAMA!!
AH... ALLOW ME AN AUDIENCE!!
PLEASE!!

HE TOOK HISAMATSU SADO UNDER HIS WING AND PLANNED TO STORM THIS PLACE...
MA... MATSUDAIRA SAKON TADATSUGU... WANTING TO AVENGE HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN AFTER THEY WERE EXECUTED OUTSIDE YOSHIDA CASTLE...
IF IT'S A LIE, WHY DO I HAVE AN ARROW IN ME?
N... NO!!


...IMMEDIATELY SET OUT WITH HIS MEN TO STOP THE ATTACK. HOWEVER, AT FOUR *LI* NORTH OF NATORI, WE MET THEIR ADVANCE TROOPS WITH AN ENORMOUS ARMY OF ODA RIGHT BEHIND THEM.
HEARING THIS NEWS FROM HIS *SUPPA*, MY LORD IEYASU...
MEANWHILE, SEEING US VACATE THE OKAZAKI CASTLE, LEAVING ONLY A FEW TO DEFEND IT, ANOTHER ODA FORCE LED BY TAKIGAWA KAZUMASU JUMPED OUT OF HIDING AND SWARMED IN.

BY THE TIME WE REALIZED, IT WAS TOO LATE.
IN HINDSIGHT, IT WAS ALL ODA'S SCHEME. TO TAKE BOTH THE CASTLES OF OKAZAKI AND NISHIGOORI, THEY USED MATSUDAIRA SAKON AND HISAMATSU SADO AS DECOYS.
MY LORD IEYASU ENTREATS YOU!
I BEG YOU, NAGATERU-SAMA! PLEASE MARCH THIS INSTANT AND JOIN US, TO FEND OFF ODA!
MY LORD IEYASU IS IN THE MIDST OF A DIFFICULT BATTLE.
IF THE MATSUDAIRA FORCES DID NOT STAND IN THE WAY OF THEIR TROOPS, THIS CASTLE MIGHT HAVE FALLEN TO A SURPRISE ATTACK!
WHY DO YOU HESITATE?!

PLEASE... NA... NAGATERU-SAMA, PLEASE HELP US!
...WAY...
...AND JOIN TOGETHER. THERE'S NO OTHER...
SINCE WE CANNOT EXPECT REINFORCEMENTS FROM SUNPU, WE MUST UNITE...
LET'S TAKE THE FIELD!
WE WILL HELP MOTOYASU!

TRUM
TRUM
TRUM
TRUM

WE'LL TAKE THE CASTLE RIGHT OUT!
IT LOOKS LIKE NAGATERU HAS VACATED HIS CASTLE. HANZŌ'S TONGUE MUST BE ROTTING.

SSST

IT'S ABOUT TIME, MILORD WILL...
YES.
LISTEN, TSUKUMO, YOU MUST GRAB NAGATERU'S WIFE. SHE IS UJIZANE'S AUNT, UNDERSTAND?
GOOD GO, TSUKUMO!
WAHHHH
YAHHHH
TRUM
TRUM
TRUM
TRUM

I SHOULD START THE FIRE NOW...
STRIKE!!

BEFORE NAGATERU REALIZES HE WAS TRICKED!! WE MUST BREAK THROUGH BEFORE HE RETURNS! OTHERWISE, THIS BATTLE IS LOST!!
GO! GOOO!!
HANZŌ LIT THE FIRE!

BREAK THROUGH FAST!
THE CASTLE IS AS GOOD AS EMPTY!

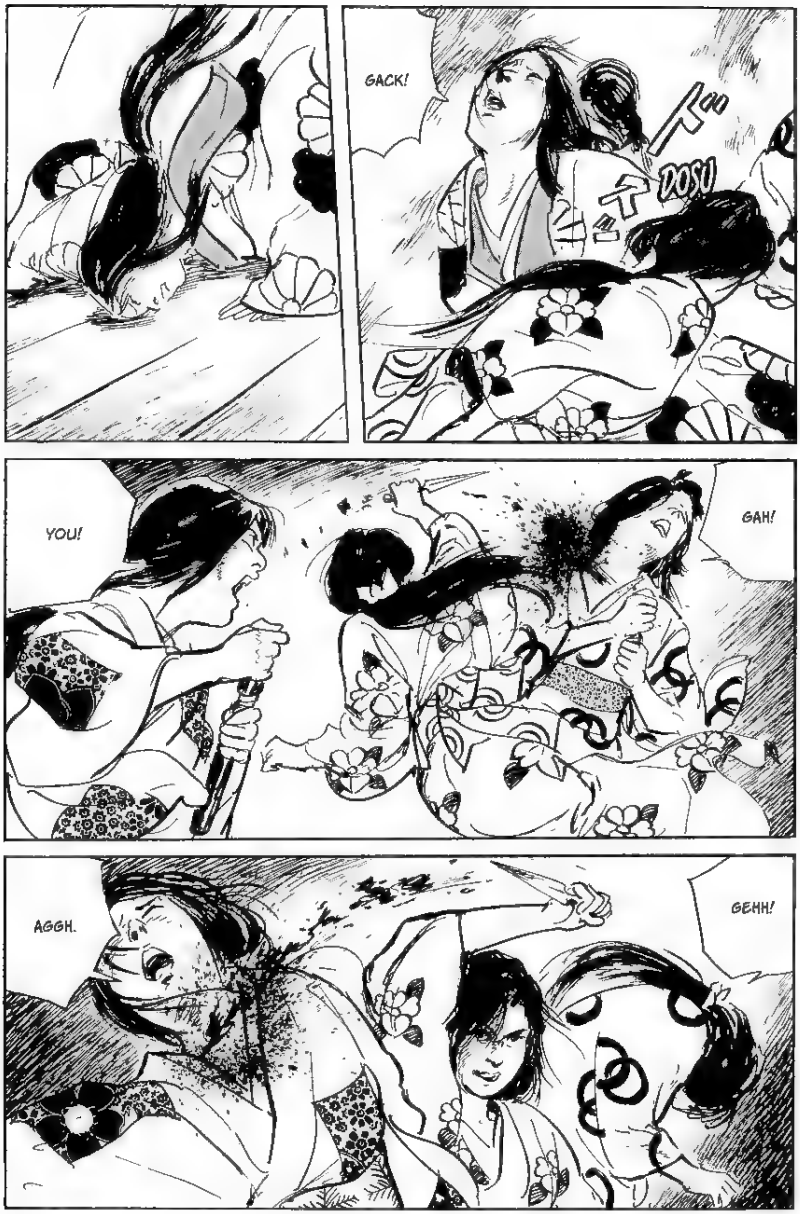
HAAAHH
EVEN IF I AM CENSURED AND CALLED A VILE COWARD!!
NAMU! GREAT BODHISATTVA OF HACHIMAN! PLEASE KEEP US UNDER YOUR DIVINE PROTECTION!! AS A HUSBAND AND A FATHER, I AM DOING EVERYTHING I CAN TO SAVE MY FAMILY. IT IS THE PATH OF A MAN, AND I SHALL DO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO FULFILL WHAT MY HEART DICTATES...
UNLESS WE TAKE NAGATERU'S WIFE AND CHILDREN HOSTAGE, MY WIFE AND CHILDREN ARE DEAD!

WHAT IS SO OFFENSIVE AND DASTARDLY ABOUT TAKING THE PATH OF A MAN AND A FATHER!!

WE MUST STAND FAST UNTIL MY FATHER RETURNS!
ARRGH! DO NOT LOSE YOUR CALM!!
UGH.
DOSU

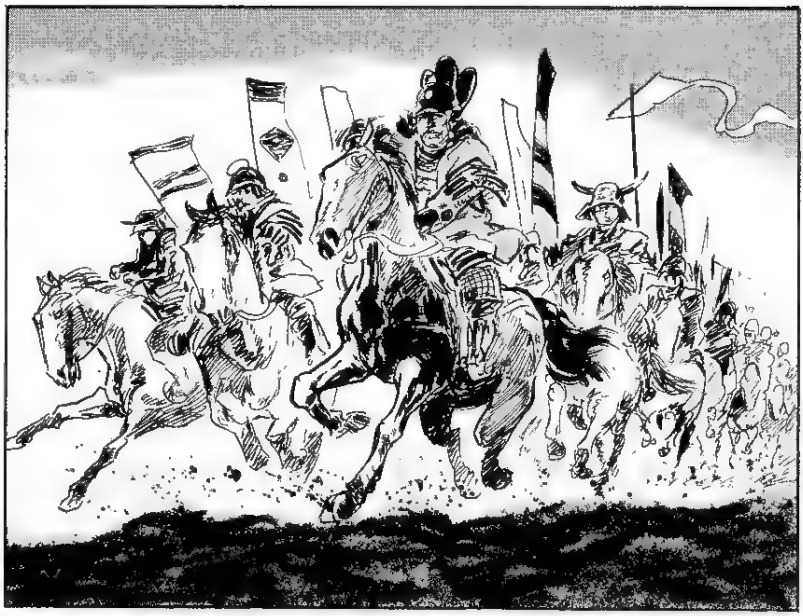
GLORICH
NO!!
OH!
KSH
GLIK
WAHHH
KYAHH

あれ
AIEEEE
キャー
KYAAHH!!


GACK!
DOSU
YOU!
GAH!
AGGH.
GEHH!

WHOA!
DOSU

BASTARD!
YOU!



NO!
I NEVER DREAMED YOU WERE THIS CORRUPT!
NO!!

HOW DARE YOU BETRAY ME, IN SPITE OF YOUR TIES TO IMAGAWA!!
YOU FILTH! MOTOYASU!!

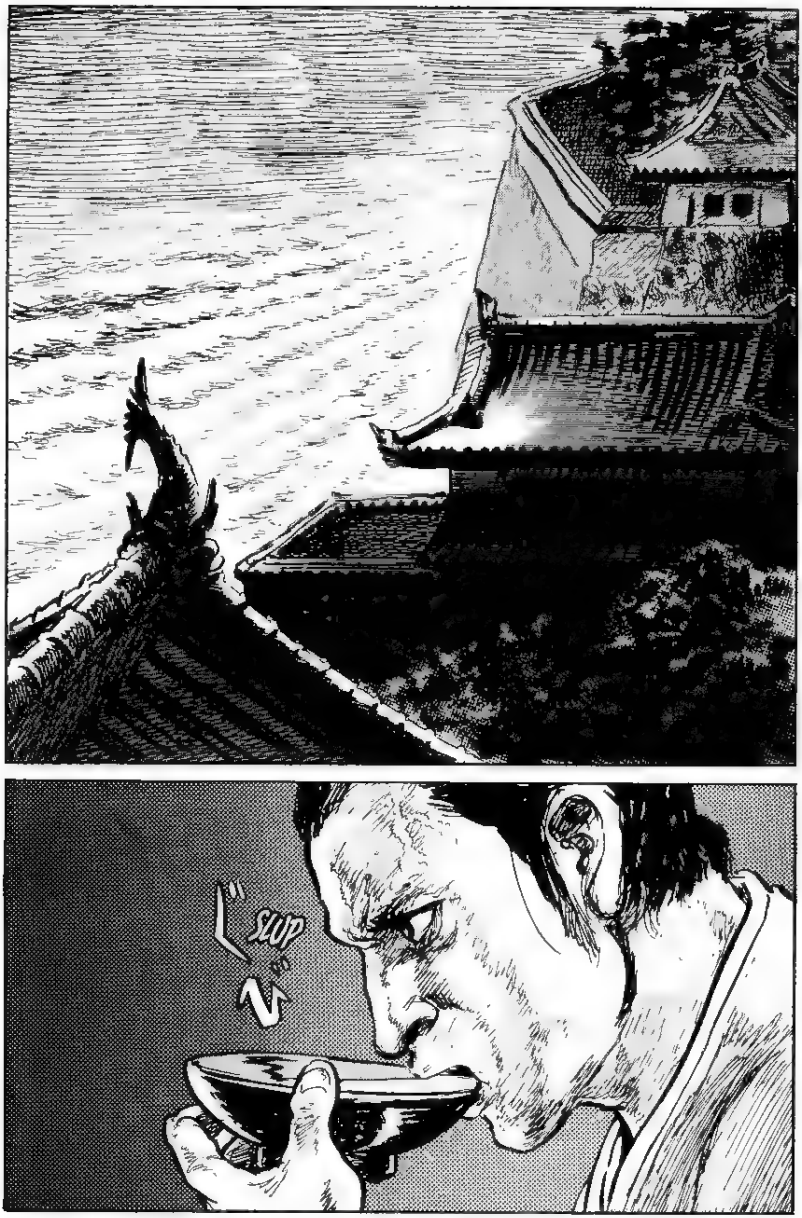
WHAT COWARDICE!! HOW VILE! THE... THE BASTARD!!
IS IT TOO LATE?! MY GOD!!
BYU
GEHH

うわ uwahhhhh

MOTOYASU!!

YAAAAH!!
YOU SCUM!!
ARE YOU STILL A SAMURAI?!
MOTO-YASU!!
IF YOU CAN ACHIEVE THAT END, WHY SHOULD YOU BE CALLED EVIL?! IT IS ONLY WHEN YOU FAIL THAT YOU SHOULD EVER BE CONSIDERED A DIRTY COWARD!
WHAT IS WAR?! IT IS ABOUT PROTECTING YOUR FAMILY, YOUR BLOOD AND YOUR PEOPLE!

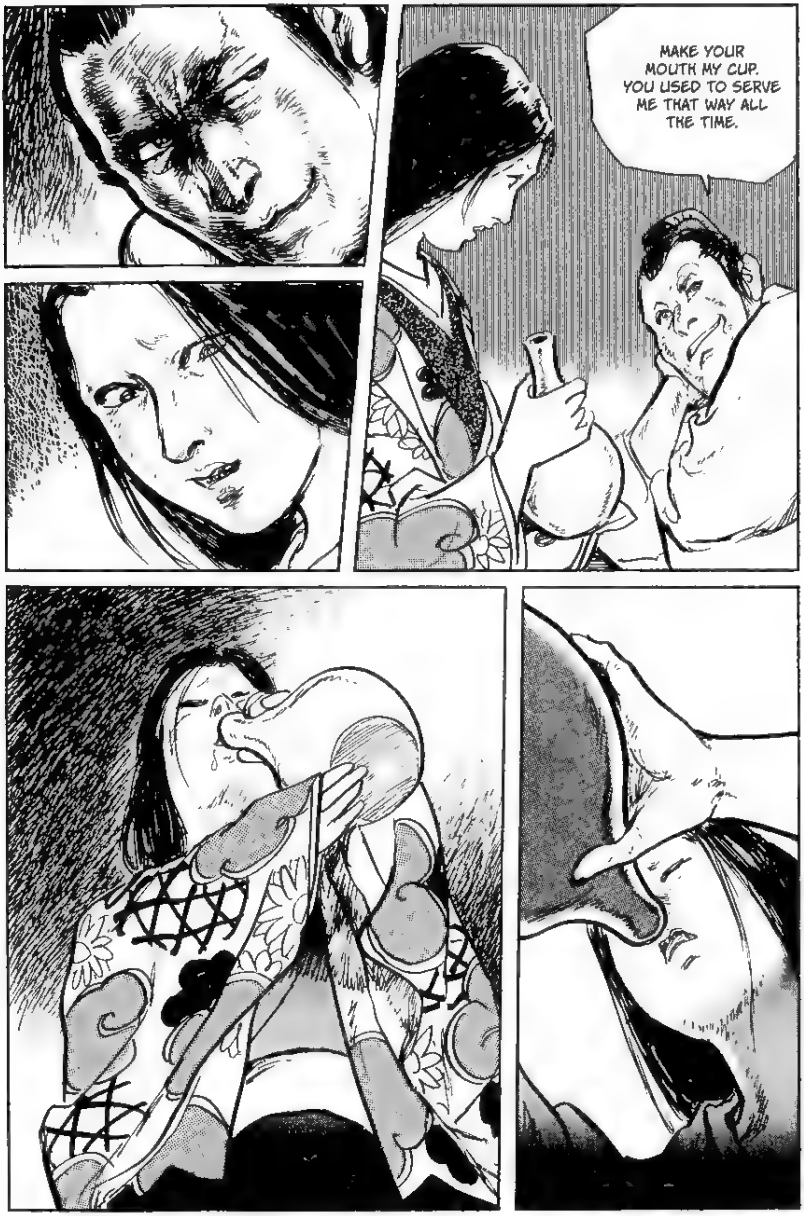
IMAGAWA MAY PERISH, BUT SO LONG AS I LIVE ON THIS EARTH, YOSHIMOTO-KŪ WILL BE WATCHING OVER ME FROM THE WORLD OF THE DEAD...
ASK YOSHIMOTO-KŪ IN HELL. HE WILL PRAISE ME FOR SPEAKING THE TRUTH.
...BECAUSE I AM THE ONE WHO'LL SETTLE HIS OLD SCORES.
NOW I SHALL CRY AT LAST! LOOK AND REMEMBER MY TEARS, AND TELL YOSHIMOTO-KŪ IN THE NETHERWORLD...
...THAT HE WAS SOMEONE I COULD REGARD AS MY OWN FATHER.


SLUP

YOU... SUMMONED ME...
WHAT DO YOU HAVE IN MIND?
I AM MOTOYASU'S WIFE.

IF I KILL TAKECHIYO, MAYBE I CAN FIND OUT WHAT DESIGNS MOTOYASU HAS IN MIND.
I WILL NOT SERVE YOU TWICE.
I CAN'T READ HIS TRUE INTENTIONS IN THE ACT OF ENTERING OKAZAKI CASTLE. IS HE STILL IMAGAWA'S VASSAL? OR IS HE ABOUT TO ALLY WITH ODA?
EVEN KNOWING HIS LOVELY WIFE AND CHILDREN ARE HERE.
I'VE SENT WORD REPEATEDLY THAT HE MUST PAY HIS RESPECTS BY COMING TO SUNPU YET, HE HAS NOT EMERGED FROM OKAZAKI-- NOT EVEN A SINGLE STEP.

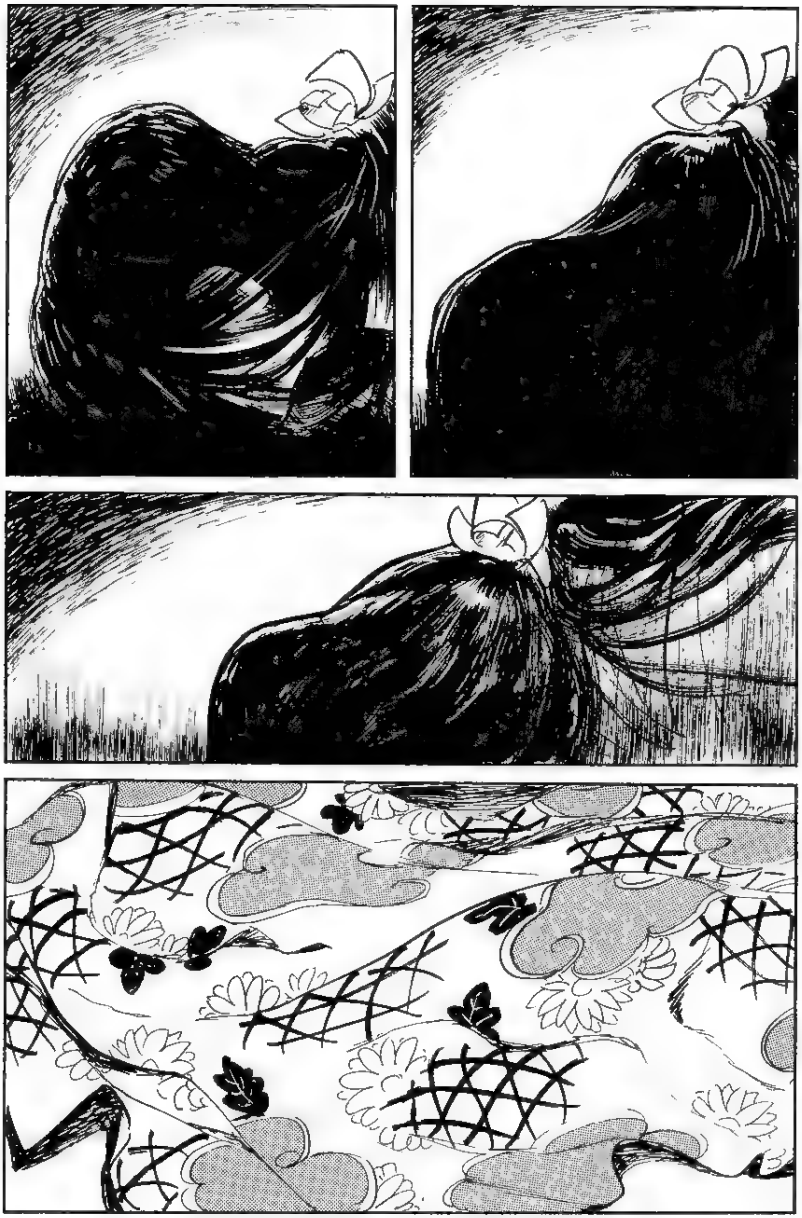
YOU... YOU WON'T DO IT...
TA... TAKECHIYO... WITH IMAGAWA BLOOD IN HIM...
I CAN WAIT NO LONGER. I WILL PUT TAKECHIYO TO THE SWORD.
IF YOU NEVER MENTION THAT YOU ARE MOTOYASU'S WIFE AGAIN, I MAY RECONSIDER.
LET ME HAVE SOME SAKE.


MAKE YOUR MOUTH MY CUP. YOU USED TO SERVE ME THAT WAY ALL THE TIME.

MOTOYASU IS A MAN POSSESSING A GENTLE SOUL. THERE'S NO COMPARISON BETWEEN US IN THE WAY HE LOVES HIS FAMILY.
AND YET, MOTOYASU WON'T COME DESPITE THE FACT YOU'RE HERE.
WHY DO YOU THINK THAT IS?
AT... AT THE MOMENT, HE'S FACING ODA, MAKING IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR HIM TO ACT. BUT HE WILL... IN DUE COURSE...

BUT HE WON'T COME. I BET HE'S HESITATING BETWEEN ODA AND IMAGAWA, WATCHING TO SEE HOW THINGS WILL WORK OUT, INTENDING TO SIDE WITH WHOEVER GIVES HIM GREATER ADVANTAGE.
WELL, I DOUBT HE'D BETRAY ME.
Y... YES.
HE WILL COME? IS THAT IT?
THAT SIMPLY MEANS HE DOESN'T CARE-- NOT AS MUCH AS YOU THINK.
NOW THAT,
WHA... WHAT ABOUT US... THEN?
I... BUT..

I'D RATHER NOT KILL A CHILD.
SERVE ME HERE THE SAME WAY. IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE YOU LAST HAD THE HONOR OF SEEING OUR FRIEND.



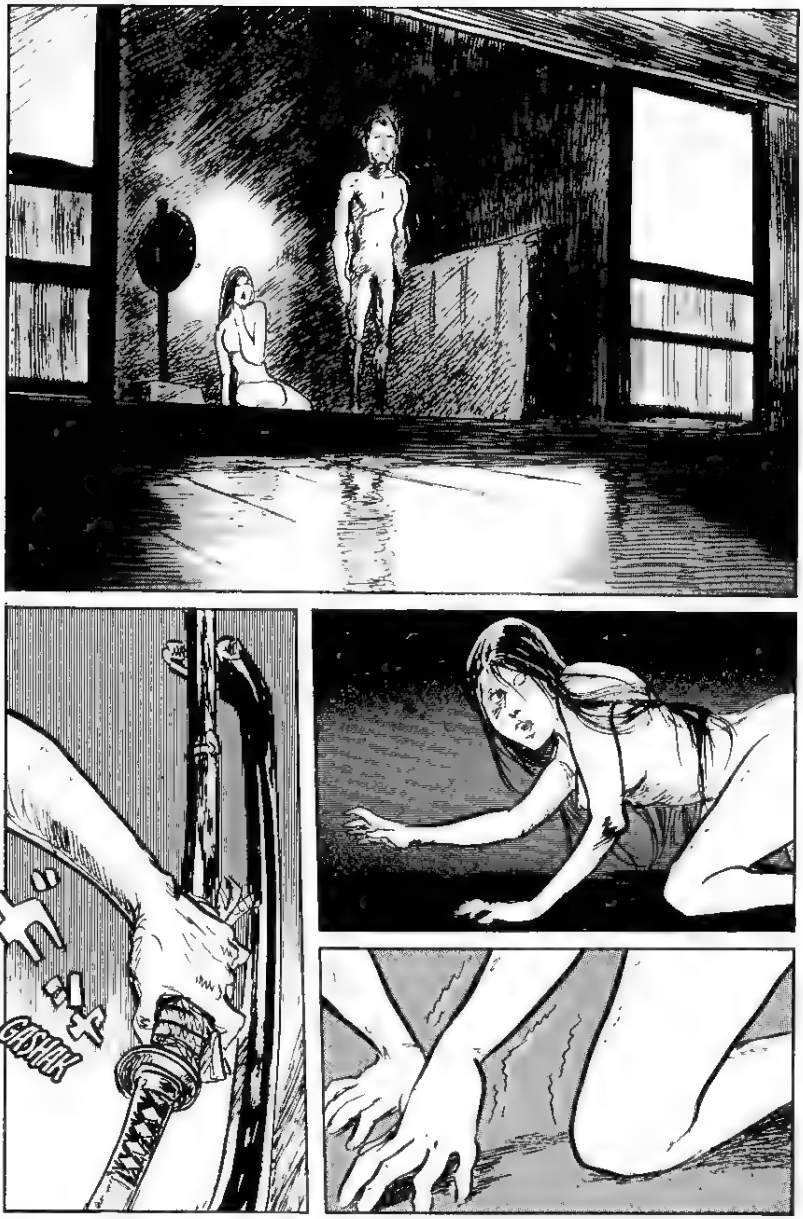
WOMEN ARE SUPPOSED TO LIE ON THE MAN'S LEFT. BUT BECAUSE YOU BECAME ACCUSTOMED TO A LEFT-HANDED MAN...
...YOU GOT IN THE HABIT OF LYING ON THE RIGHT.
HE MUST'VE FIGURED IT OUT. I'M THE ONLY MAN IN IMAGAWA WHO'S LEFT-HANDED, YOU KNOW.
I WONDER HOW MOTOYASU TOOK IT.

あぁ
AHHHH
THAT'S WHY I'M TELLING YOU, MOTOYASU DOESN'T LOVE YOU AS MUCH AS YOU THINK.

あHHHH!
KEK KEK KEK.
THERE'S NO
COMPARISON BETWEEN
ME AND MOTOYASU,
IS THERE?
HEE HEE HEE.
あ
AAHAHA!

I HAVE NEWS, SIR!
WHA--
MATSUDAIRA MOTOYASU ATTACKED THE CASTLE OF NISHIGOORI AND...
...KILLED UDONO NAGATERU-SAMA!

MO...
MOTOYASU...
KILLED...
MY UNCLE...?
WHA...
WHA...
WE
BELIEVE
THEY'VE
BEEN TAKEN
HOSTAGE.
WHA...
WHAT ABOUT
MY AUNT?
AND UJINAGA
AND UJITSUGU?


GASHAK

BASTARD! MOTOYASU!!
わっ
WA!
I'LL SEND MOTOYASU YOUR HEAD AND TAKECHIYO'S!!
EEEK

FOOSH
SLIPP

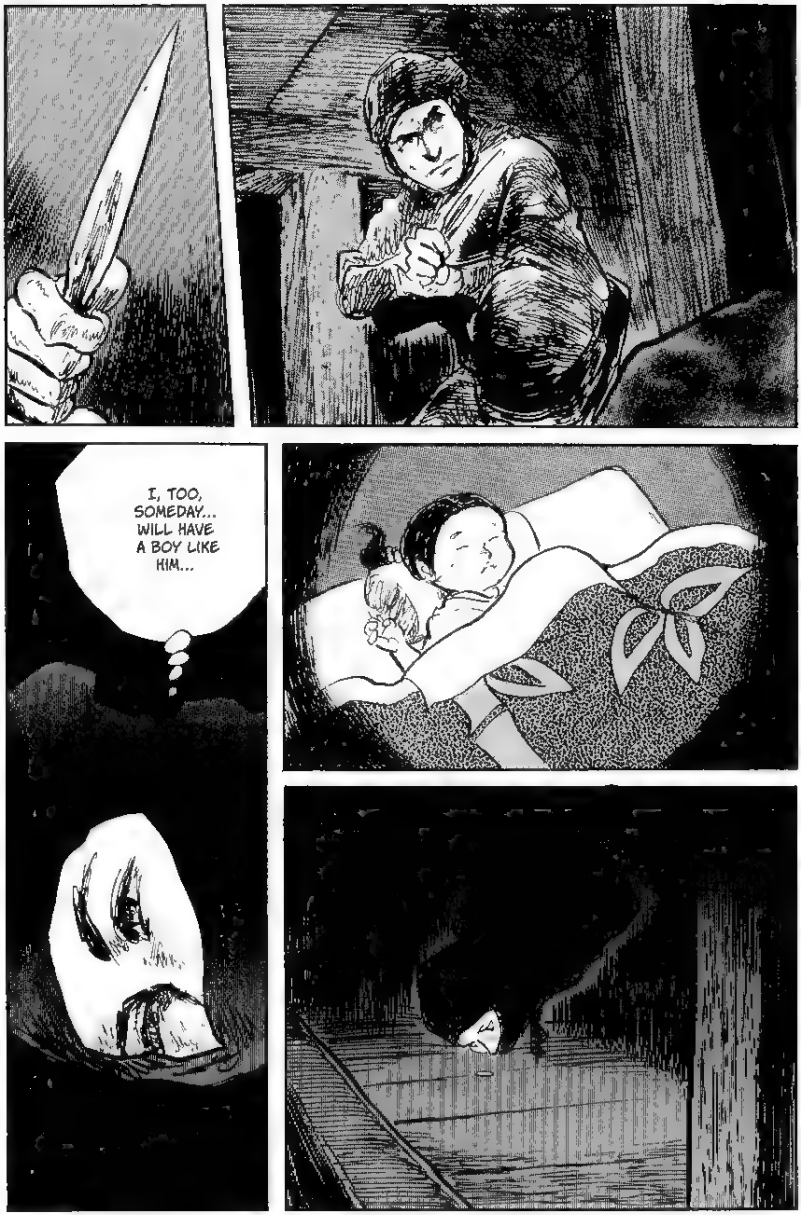
THOMP
GARA
GARA

AAHHHH
BYU
HO...
HOLD...
AAH.

ERRR...
AIEE....
Y...
YOU TRIED...
YOU TRIED TO KILL ME...
ME...!
WHAT...
KIND OF A MAN...
ARE YOU...?
P-P...
PLEASE...
HO...
HOLD IT...

AFTER ALL THAT... YOU... YOU TRIED TO KILL ME...
YOU... YOU MADE ME A WOMAN... AND THEN TOYED WITH ME... AS MUCH AS YOU PLEASED... AND MADE ME MOTOYASU'S BRIDE THE MOMENT YOU WERE BORED... AND NOW... THIS TIME... YOU SUMMONED ME... JUST TO HOLD ME IN CONTEMPT...
BYUU
G... GOT IT...
URR... Y... YEAH...
I... I... I DID NOT MARRY MOTOYASU BECAUSE I WANTED TO!!

WOA!


I, TOO, SOMEDAY... WILL HAVE A BOY LIKE HIM...

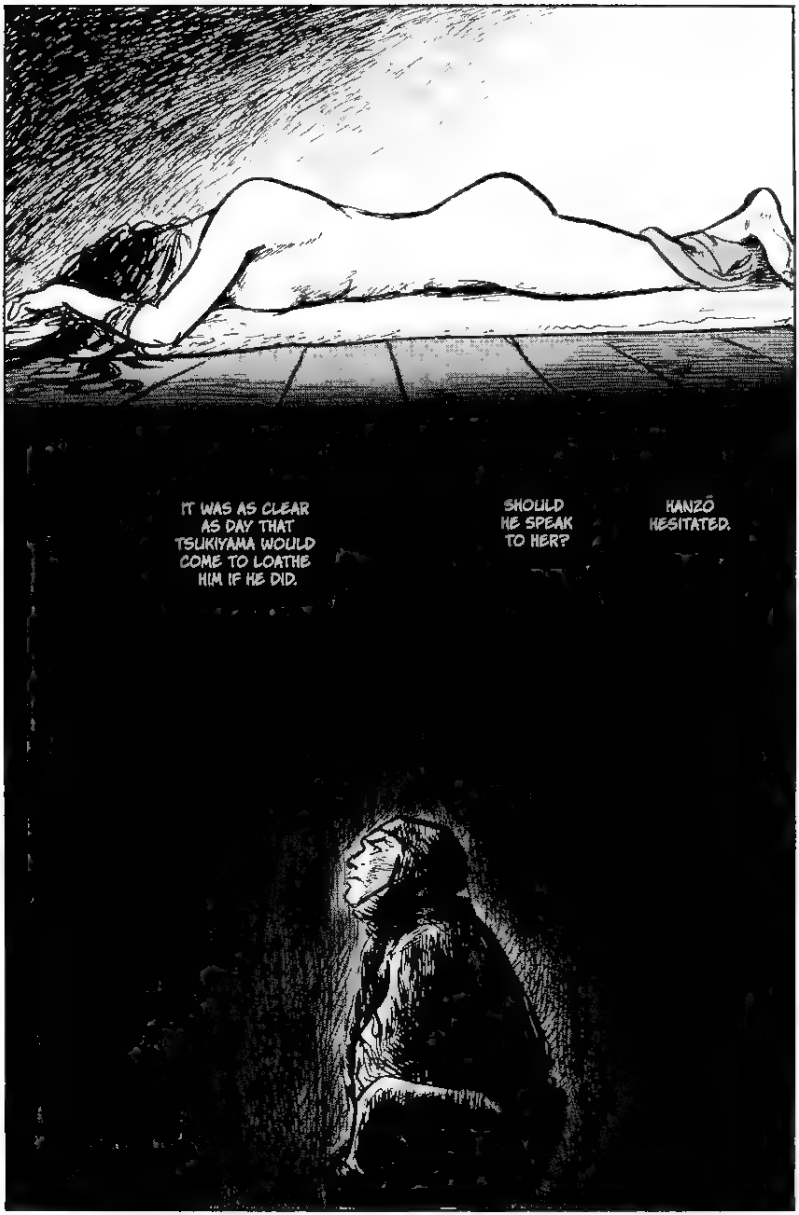
HM...

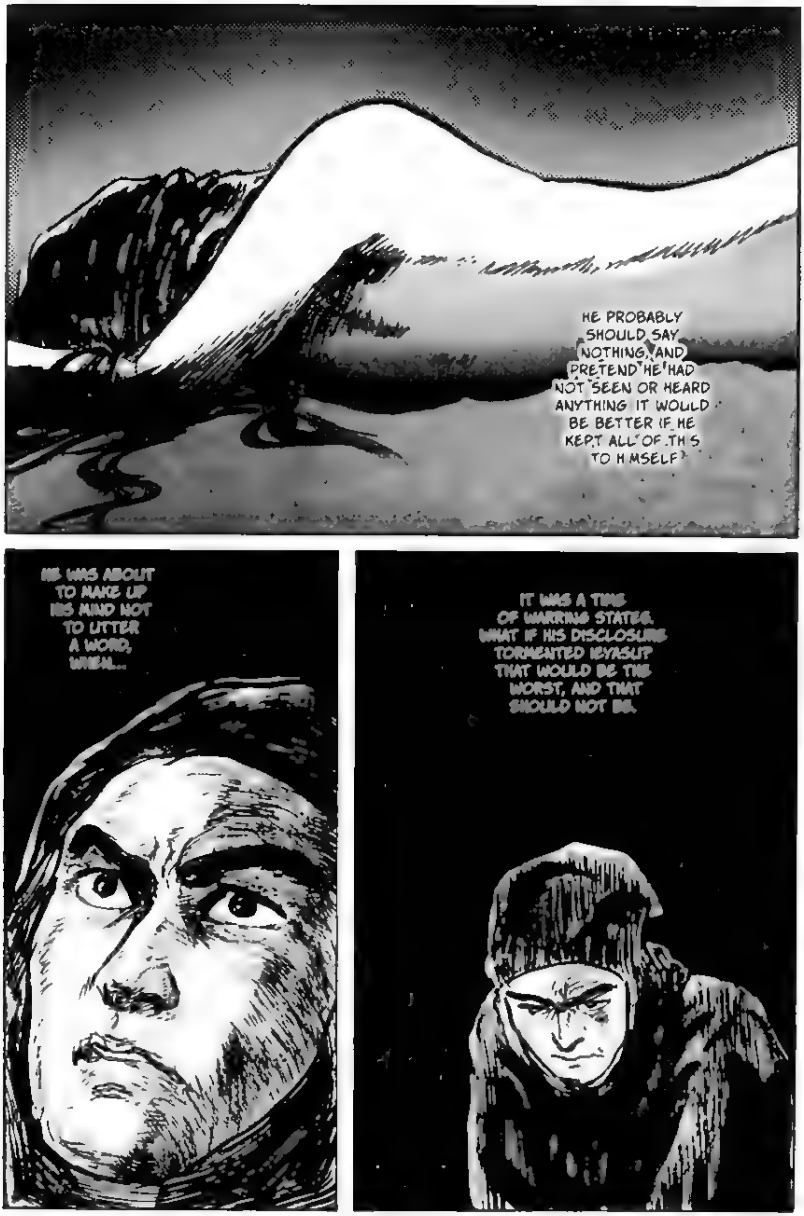
I...
I...
I...

WHEN TSUKIYAMA WAS DRIVEN TO THE EXTREME, HER DEEPEST BEING TOOK OVER IT WAS THE INSTINCT OF A MOTHER
THEY SAY WOMEN ARE STRONG AND THEY SAY THE STRENGTH IS IN THEIR NATURE, AND IT WILL MANIFEST ITSELF MOST WHEN EVERYTHING IS NEARLY LOST
IT WAS INHERENT IN HER TO PROTECT HER SON IF SHE FINISHED UJIZANE RIGHT THERE, TAKECHIYO COULD NOT LIVE AND IF SHE COULD NOT KILL HIM, THEN WHAT COULD SHE DO?
IT WAS NOT REASONING THAT DID IT OUT OF INSTINCT, OUT OF HER MOST FUNDAMENTAL TRAIT AS A WOMAN, SHE WAS PROPELLED TO TAKE THE STEPS SHE MUST TO SAVE HER SON.

AHHH, DARLING, MY DARLING UJIZANE-SAMA!
HE WAS WITH THE WIFE OF IEYASU, WHO'D BETRAYED HIM.
AHHH.
UH.
UH.
I'D BEEN THROWN INTO A FIRE... THAT'S WHAT IT WAS LIKE.
HE HAD YET TO EJACULATE

THE MOMENT HE CONSUMMATED HIS LUST, HIS WRATH TOWARD IEYASU WITHERED RAPIDLY.
SLUMP
AAHH.
UH... C... COMING...
MATSUDAIRA IEYASU-DONO'S MESSENGER, ISHIKAWA KAZUMASA-DONO HAS JUST ARRIVED.
HANZŌ SAW TSUKIYAMA'S ACTIONS DIFFERENTLY. HE THOUGHT HER BODY HAD NOT FORGOTTEN THE MAN SHE ONCE SLEPT WITH— THAT IT WAS HER LUST THAT MADE HER BEHAVE THE WAY SHE'D D
AND HE THOUGHT... IT WAS UGLY.


IT WAS AS CLEAR AS DAY THAT TSUKIYAMA WOULD COME TO LOATHE HIM IF HE DID.
SHOULD HE SPEAK TO HER?
HANZŌ HESITATED.


HE PROBABLY SHOULD SAY NOTHING AND PRETEND HE HAD NOT SEEN OR HEARD ANYTHING IT WOULD BE BETTER IF HE KEPT ALL OF THIS TO HIMSELF
HE WAS ABOUT TO MAKE UP HIS MIND NOT TO UTTER A WORD, WHEN...
IT WAS A TIME OF WARRING STATES. WHAT IF HIS DISCLOSURE TORMENTED WEIASU? THAT WOULD BE THE WORST, AND THAT SHOULD NOT BE.

MILADY.
THIS IS HANZŌ MASANARI. I AM SERVING IN THE DARK, BENEATH THE FLOOR, SO DO NOT BE ALARMED.

YOU MUST HAVE BEEN WORRIED, BUT FEAR NO MORE. ISHIKAWA KAZUMASA-*SAMA* HAS ALREADY ARRIVED AS MILORD'S MESSENGER. IN EXCHANGE FOR TAKING YOU, MILADY, ALONG WITH TAKECHIYO-*GIMI* AND KAME-HIME-*SAMA*, BACK TO OKAZAKI, WE WILL HAND OVER THE WIFE OF UDONO NAGATERU-*DONO* AND THEIR SONS, UJINAGA AND UJITSUGU. IT'S ALL ARRANGED.
MA .. MASANARI...
TAKECHIYO-*GIMI* IS ALSO UNDER MY *SUPPA*'S PROTECTION. THERE IS NOTHING FOR YOU TO BE AFRAID OF NOW.

HOW... HOW LONG... WERE YOU HIDING... BELOW?
... ...
MA... MASANARI!
YES, MILADY.
WHY...
WHY... DO YOU NOT ANSWER?

IT IS ALREADY OVER AN HOUR.
I'M ASKING YOU... SINCE WHEN... WERE YOU THERE!
URG...

BUT WHAT?!
BUT...
BUT, MILADY, A NINJA'S HEART DOES NOT SEE, DOES NOT HEAR, AND DOES NOT SPEAK.
WHAT HAS HAPPENED, HAS HAPPENED.
PLEASE PROMISE ME ONE THING. EVEN AFTER YOU REUNITE WITH MILORD IN OKAZAKI, FOR THE NEXT TEN MONTHS...
...PLEASE REFRAIN FROM SLEEPING WITH HIM.

THE CHANCES ARE VERY SMALL, BUT STILL... SO, PLEASE, I BESEECH YOU.
I DO NOT WISH TO SERVE AS THE VASSAL OF A CHILD OF A MAN LIKE UJIZANE.
AND FROM THAT NIGHT AS HANZO FORESAW, TSUKIYAMA BECAME HIS ENEMY.
THE ONLY REASON HANZO DARED TO SPEAK TO TSUKIYAMA WAS HIS CONCERN THAT SHE MIGHT BEAR UJIZANE'S SEED

THE LIFE OF A SERVANT, WHO MADE HIS MASTER'S WIFE HIS ENEMY, BECAME DARK AND OPPRESSIVE.
IT CONTINUED UNTIL TSUKIYAMA DIED ON AUGUST 29TH OF THE SEVENTH YEAR OF TENSHO (1579 A.D.). IT WAS THE HARDEST PERIOD OF HATTORI HANZŌ MASANARI'S LIFE, DURING WHICH A LINE WAS DRAWN BETWEEN HIM AND IEYASU.

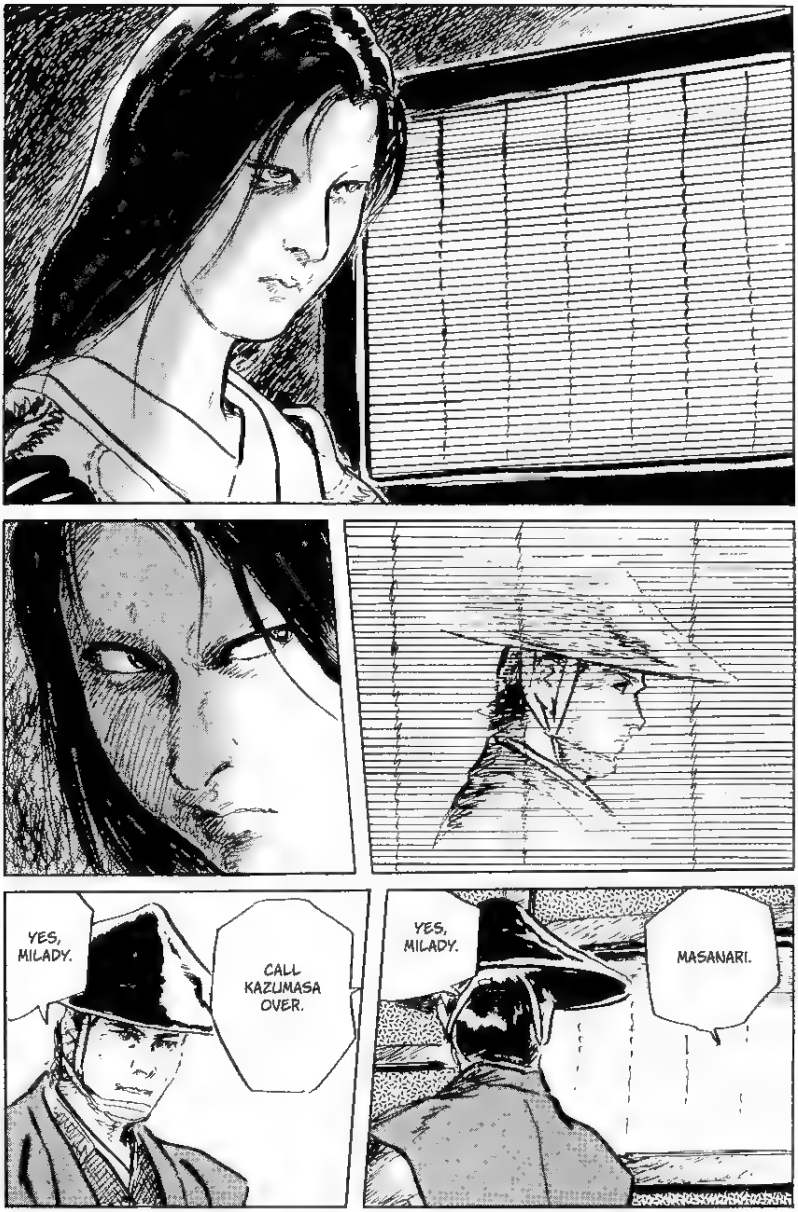
MMM... HOW... IMPERTINENT... HOW DARE YOU TALK THAT WAY!
HMPH!!
WE LIVE IN A TIME OF CIVIL WAR. THERE ARE DAYS WHEN WE MUST FACE THE SUN JUST TO SURVIVE. BY THE SAME TOKEN, THERE ARE TIMES WHEN WE MUST TURN OUR BACKS ON IT. PLEASE THINK CAREFULLY BEFORE YOU DECIDE.

WHAT IF...
WHAT IF TSUKIYAMA BEARS MY CHILD...
WHAT GREAT PLEASURE THAT WOULD GIVE ME... HEH HEH HEH HEH HEH.
HOW INTERESTING. IF MY SEED BECOMES MOTOYASU'S BLOODLINE...
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
UWA HA HA HA HA HA HA.

HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
FINE. EXCHANGING HOSTAGES IS CUSTOMARY IN THESE CRAZY TIMES ANYWAY.
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA

# Chapter On Relinquishing Paths

## No. 4: The Vilamba's Man


YES, MILADY.
CALL KAZUMASA OVER.
YES, MILADY.
MASANARI.

I DO NOT EXPECT TO RETURN TO THIS LAND IN MY LIFE. SO, BEFORE I LEAVE, I WANT TO VISIT THE CHIEF PRIEST OF THE FUJI ICHINOMIYA SHRINE JUST THIS ONCE.
HE IS SOMEONE WHO WAS KIND WHEN I WAS A GIRL, AND NURTURED ME.
ER... YES.
IT SHOULD NOT TAKE LONG. HALF AN HOUR SHOULD BE PLENTY.

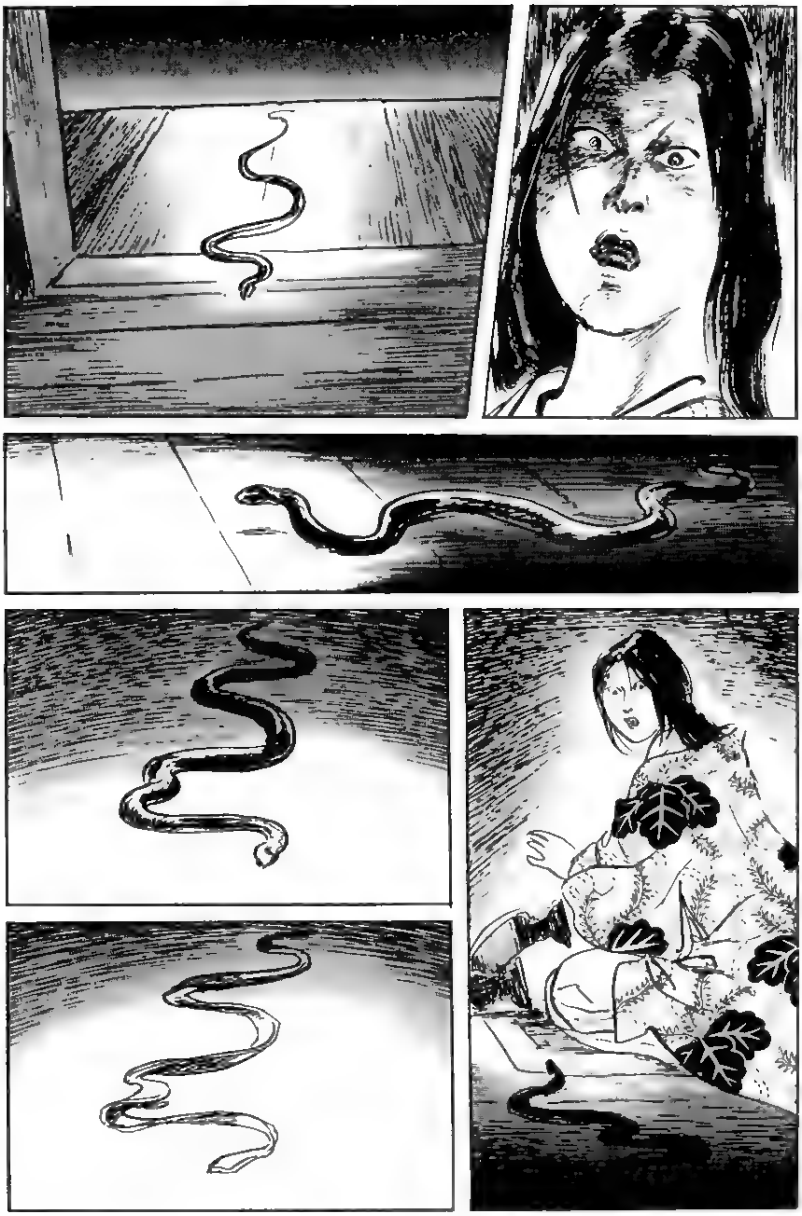
JUST WAIT THERE.
NO NEED TO ACCOMPANY ME.

HM.
THIS CANNOT BE HELPED
IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME.

"I'M
THIS POND
IS SACRED
SO PLEASE
ARDON ME."
"THEN
PLEASE LET
ME CLEANSE
MY BODY
AND OFFER
MY PRAYERS
FIRST."
"NO, YOU
MUST GET
OUT."
"NO!
FETCH
IT RIGHT
NOW!!"

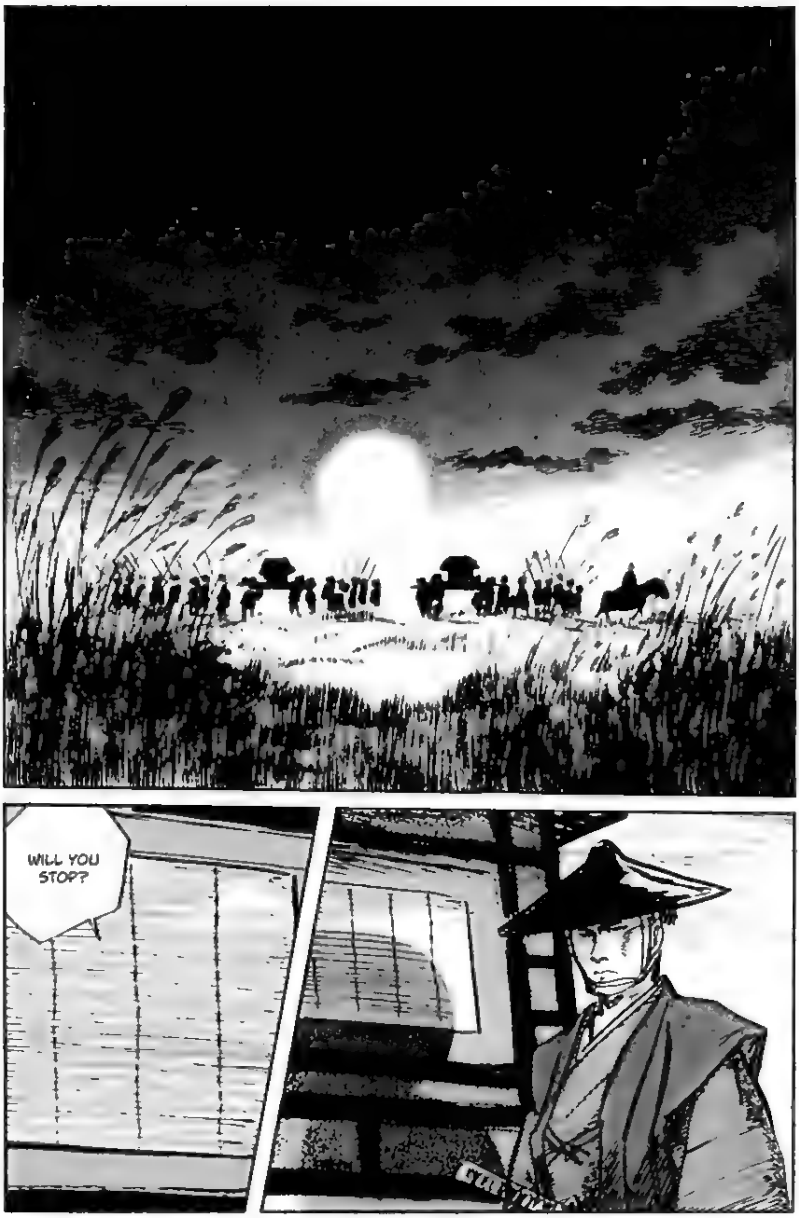
TOP
AND SO?
I AM ABOUT TO ENTER MIKAWA. I DOUBT IF I'LL EVER SET FOOT ON THE LAND OF SUNPU AGAIN.
THERE IS NO SIGN OF ANYONE AROUND.

HE IS A SKILLED SUPPA.
A MAN OF IGA THEN?
HIS NAME IS HATTORI HANZŌ MASANARI.
I WANT A MAN WHO CLOSELY ATTENDS MY PALANQUIN KILLED BEFORE WE REACH THE CASTLE OF OKAZAKI.
HE IS CALLED ENŌ. HE HAS MYSTERIOUS POWERS AND EMPLOYS SKILLS UNPARALLELED BY ANY OTHER HAGURO SHUGENJA.
WE HAVE A YAMABUSHI STAYING WITH US.
CHIRRUN
I'VE LOOKED OUT FOR ENO OVER A YEAR NOW. SO, BE IT WATER OR FIRE, IF I ASK HIM A FAVOR, HE WON'T HESITATE TO JUMP IN.
LET ME SUMMON HIM.
HMPH.

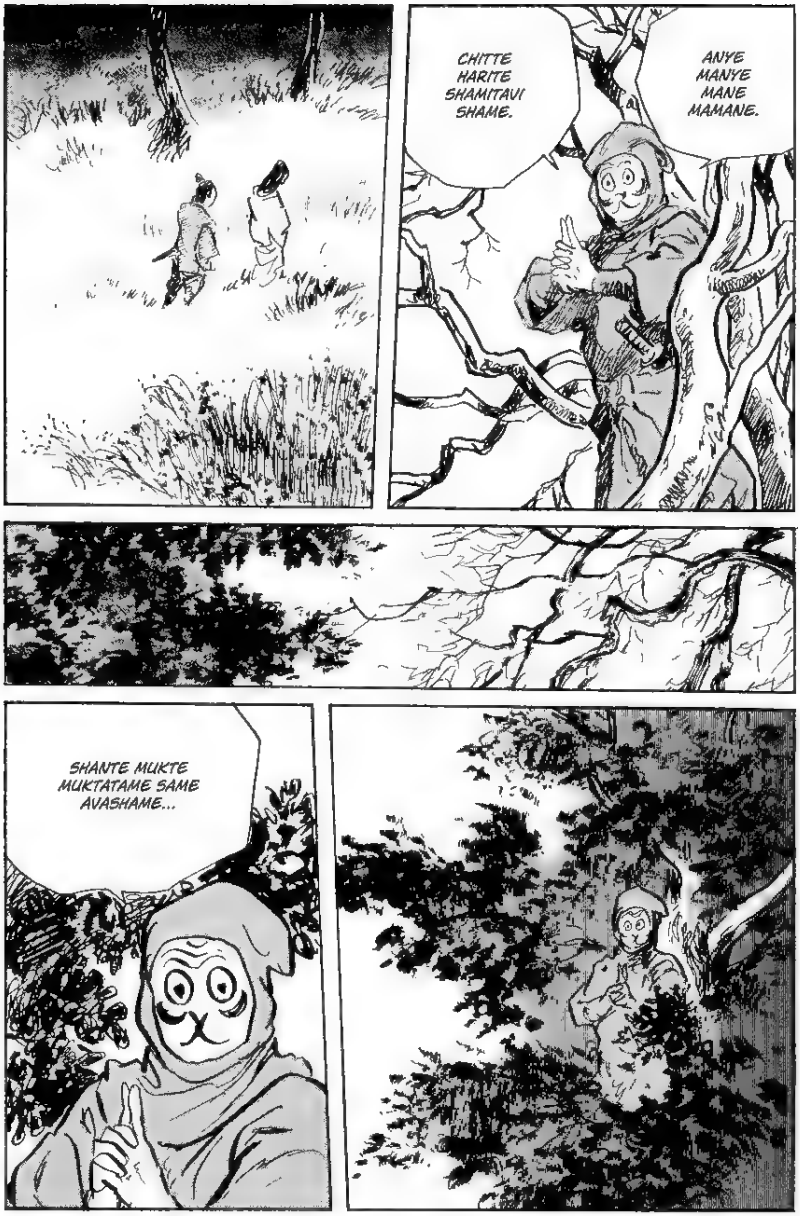


ACK!
CHITTE HARITE SHAMITAVI SHAME.
ANYE MANYE MANE MAMANE.
OHH.
SHANTE MUKTE MUKTATAME SAME AVASHAME...

HOW WELL INFORMED YOU ARE.
THE DHARANI SPELL...
I AM TOMA ENŌ.


WILL YOU STOP?

TAKE A BREAK WHILE YOU WAIT.
YES, MILADY.
WILL YOU FIND ME SOME SECLUDED PLACE?
YES, MILADY.
MASANARI.

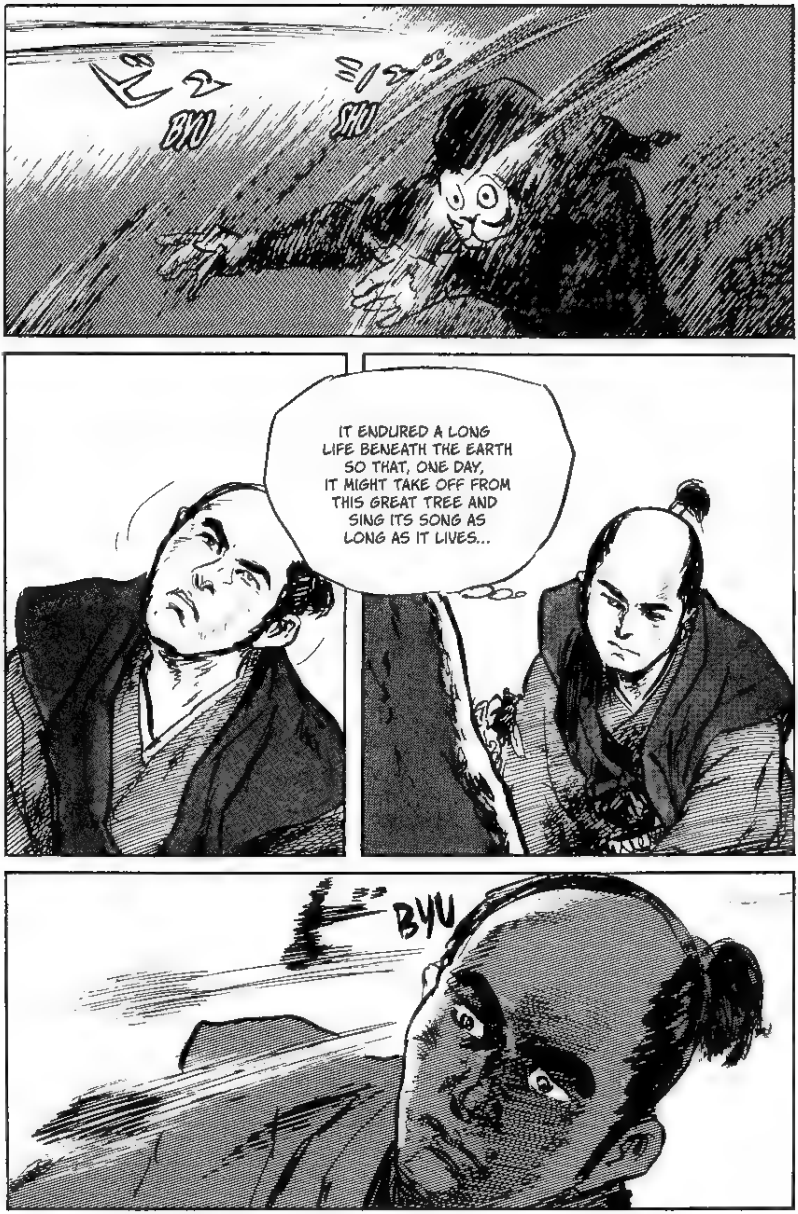

CHITTE HARITE SHAMITAVI SHAME.
ANYE MANYE MANE MAMANE.
SHANTE MUKTE MUKTATAME SAME AVASHAME...

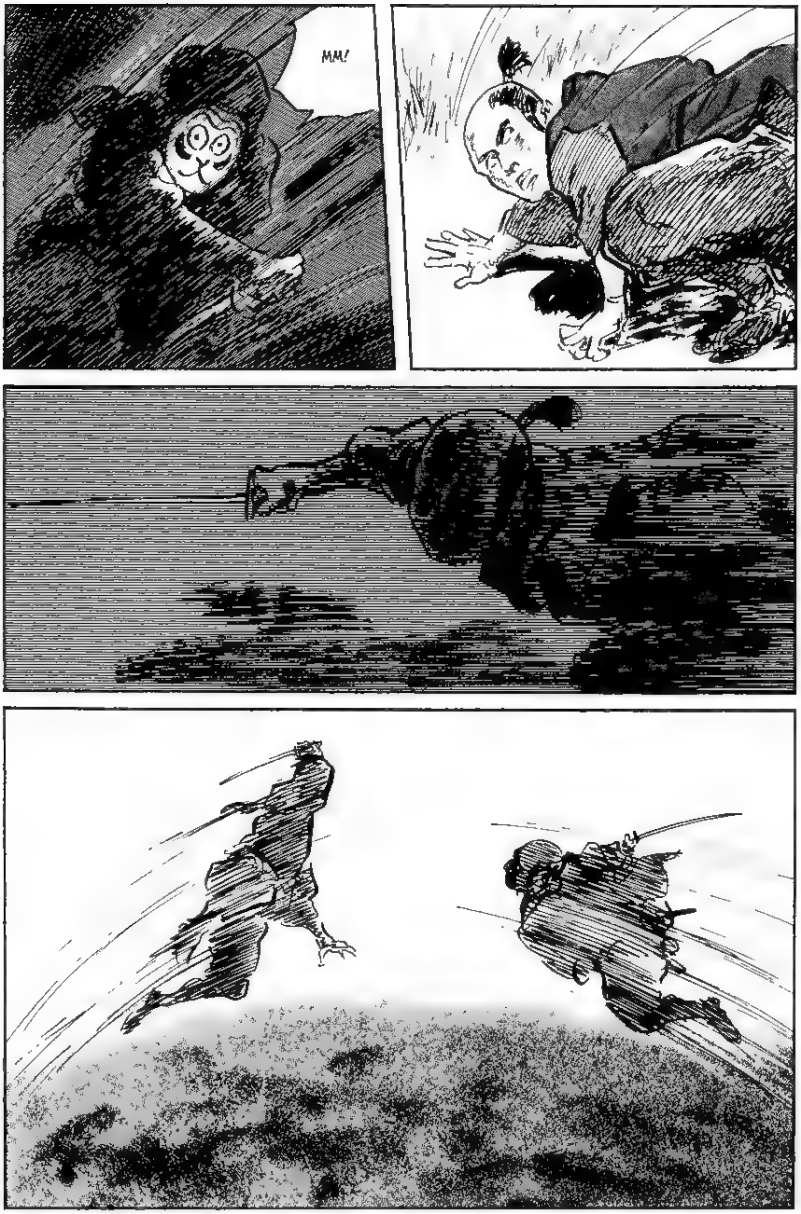
YES, MILADY.
WAIT THERE.

HANZŌ DID NOT KNOW WHAT AWAITED HIM THERE.
THE TRAP WAS LAID UNDER THE ASSUMPTION THAT HE WOULD NEVER TURN TO LOOK.

NO VASSAL WOULD DREAM OF PEEKING AT THE SIGHT OF HIS MASTER'S WIFE URINATING.
THE TRAP WAS WRETCHED AND VILE, AND YET INGENIOUS, WITH A HIGH CHANCE OF SUCCESS-- SOMETHING ONLY A WOMAN COULD CONTRIVE.

A... SPRING CICADA.
DHHHH


BYU
SHU
IT ENDURED A LONG LIFE BENEATH THE EARTH SO THAT, ONE DAY, IT MIGHT TAKE OFF FROM THIS GREAT TREE AND SING ITS SONG AS LONG AS IT LIVES...
BYU


MM!

BYU
SHU

I DID NOT DODGE.
TELL ME HOW YOU COULD EVADE MY SENBAN!
HOW...?!
WHY.. HOW WERE YOU ABLE TO DODGE THAT?
NOR DID YOUR AIM FALL SHORT OF THE MARK. IT WAS FATE. AND ALL IT SUGGESTS IS THAT MY FORTUNE ISN'T EXHAUSTED YET.
I AM TŌMA ENŌ, THE VILAMBA'S MAN.
WHO ARE YOU?!
NEXT TIME, I'LL MAKE SURE YOU'RE LEFT WITH NOTHING.

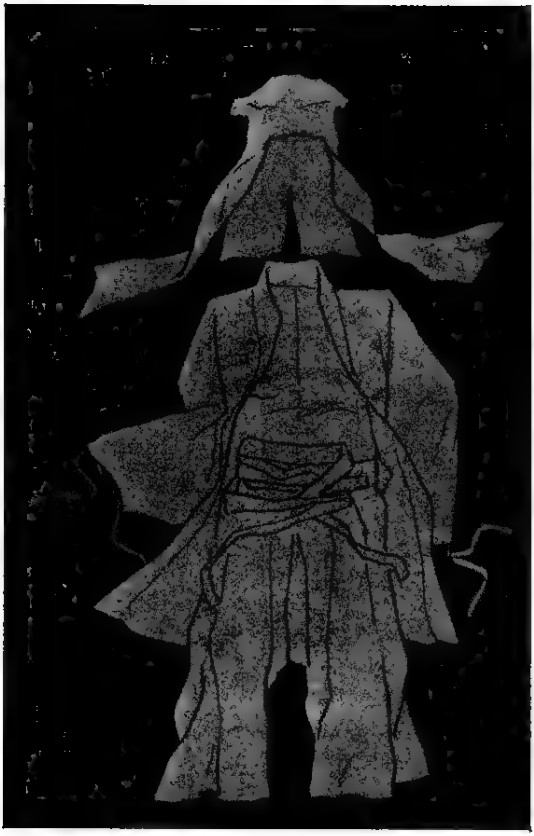
SINCE HE USED SENBAN, HE MUST BE A YAMABUSHI OF THE TOGAKUSHI-HA.
VILAMBA... I THINK THAT IN THE DHARANI CHAPTER OF THE SUTRA, LAMBA REPRESENTS BONDAGE. DOES THAT MEAN THAT VILAMBA WOULD SIGNIFY INDEPENDENCE?!

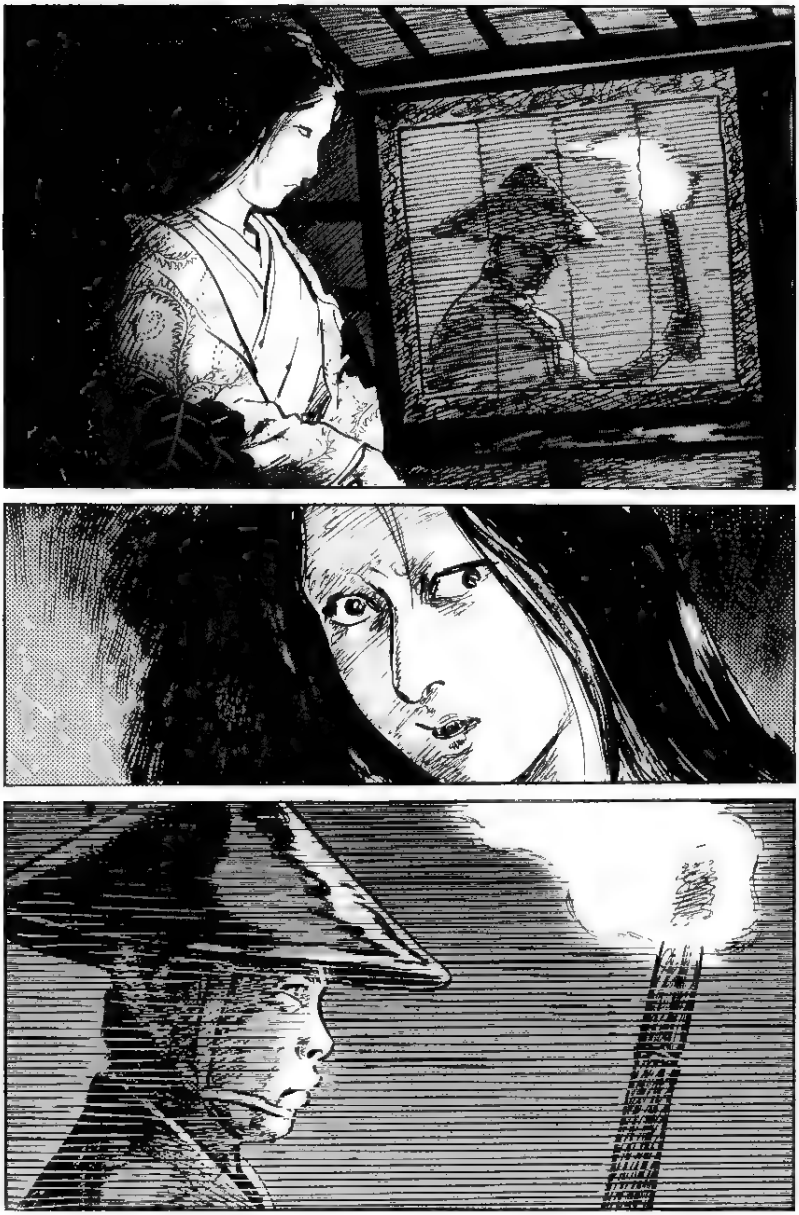
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
AH, I SEE. INDEPENDENCE MEANS TO BE RELEASED FROM BONDAGE-- THAT IS, TO BE DISCHARGED.
WHEN MILADY VISITED THE FUJI ICHINOMIYA SHRINE, SHE SCHEMED TO HAVE HIM KILL ME.
MASTER DISCHARGING SERVANT... HE TOOK ON THE ROLE OF SEVERING THE BOND OF MASTER-SERVANT... THAT MUST BE WHY HE CALLS HIMSELF THE VILAMBA'S MAN.

SHALL WE GO, MILADY?
SASUKE WAS SIXTEEN YEARS OLD. HE WAS A *RAPPA* OF *YAMABUSHI*, WHO EXCELLED IN JUMPING FROM TREE TO TREE, WHICH, DESPITE HIS AGE, AWARDED HIM THE NICKNAME OF ENO.

# Chapter On Relinquishing Paths

## No. 5: Enduring in Ninja's Garb





WHERE DID... MASANARI GO?!
COULD HE HAVE RUSHED AHEAD TO SEE MOTOYASU-DONO? TO TELL HIM ABOUT ME...?
MASANARI MUST KNOW... THAT ENO WAS AN ASSASSIN I SENT.
DESPITE THAT, HE DOES NOT SHOW IT. NOT AT ALL. COULD HE HAVE SOME PLOT IN MIND...?
HE MUST BE KEPT AWAY.
ONCE WE ENTER OKAZAKI, I CANNOT HAVE KIM ANYWHERE NEAR MOTOYASU-DONO. WHATEVER IT TAKES, I MUST KEEP KIM AWAY.

THAT WAY, I CAN EARN SOME TIME. BY THE TIME HE RETURNS, I'LL HAVE COAXED MOTOYASU-DONO INTO BECOMING MY PUPPET.
AH, I HAVE AN IDEA. I'LL SEND HIM BACK TO SUNPU AGAIN....
CALL MASANARI OVER!
PLEASE STOP!
THAT'S IT!

PATROL-LING...?
HE'S OUT PATROLLING AT THE MOMENT.
THEY COULD FALL ON US AT ANY MINUTE. THAT'S WHY HE'S OUT ROAMING THE PERIMETER.
WE'RE UNEASY ABOUT TAKEDA'S MANEUVERS. IF THEY TAKE YOU AND OUR YOUNG PRINCE HOSTAGE AGAIN, MILADY, THEY'LL HAVE NO FEAR OF THE FUTURE WHEN THEY ATTACK SUNPU. AND NOW IS THEIR GREATEST CHANCE.
PLEASE DO NOT WORRY.
AND... WHAT IF THEY DO?
TAKEDA COULD...?!

JŌKANNYŪDŌ-DONO IS ACCOMPANYING US IN SECRET. HE HAS FIVE HUNDRED MEN WITH HIM.
THE HATTORI CLAN OF IGA IS REMARKABLE. EVEN I CANNOT SENSE THEIR PRESENCE. WITH ALL OF THAT IN ADDITION TO MASANARI, THEY ARE FORMIDABLE INDEED. HA HA HA HA HA.

WHAT?!
TO TELL THE TRUTH, I AM NOT THE ONE WHO'S DIRECTING THIS PROCESSION.
WE'RE ALL ACTING UNDER HIS ORDERS. I'M JUST A DECOY, PLACED TO COVER THE TRUTH. HA HA HA HA HA.
IT'S MASANARI.
I HOPE YOU'LL REWARD HIM FOR WHAT HE HAS DONE.
WITHOUT HIS EFFORTS, MILADY, WE WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO GET YOU OUT OF SUNPU.
HE IS THE MAN WHO NOT ONLY CAME UP WITH THE PLOT TO EXCHANGE HOSTAGES, BUT ALSO SUCCESSFULLY EXECUTED IT. HE IS THE ONE WHO WENT TO KIDNAP NAGATERU'S WIFE AND SONS.

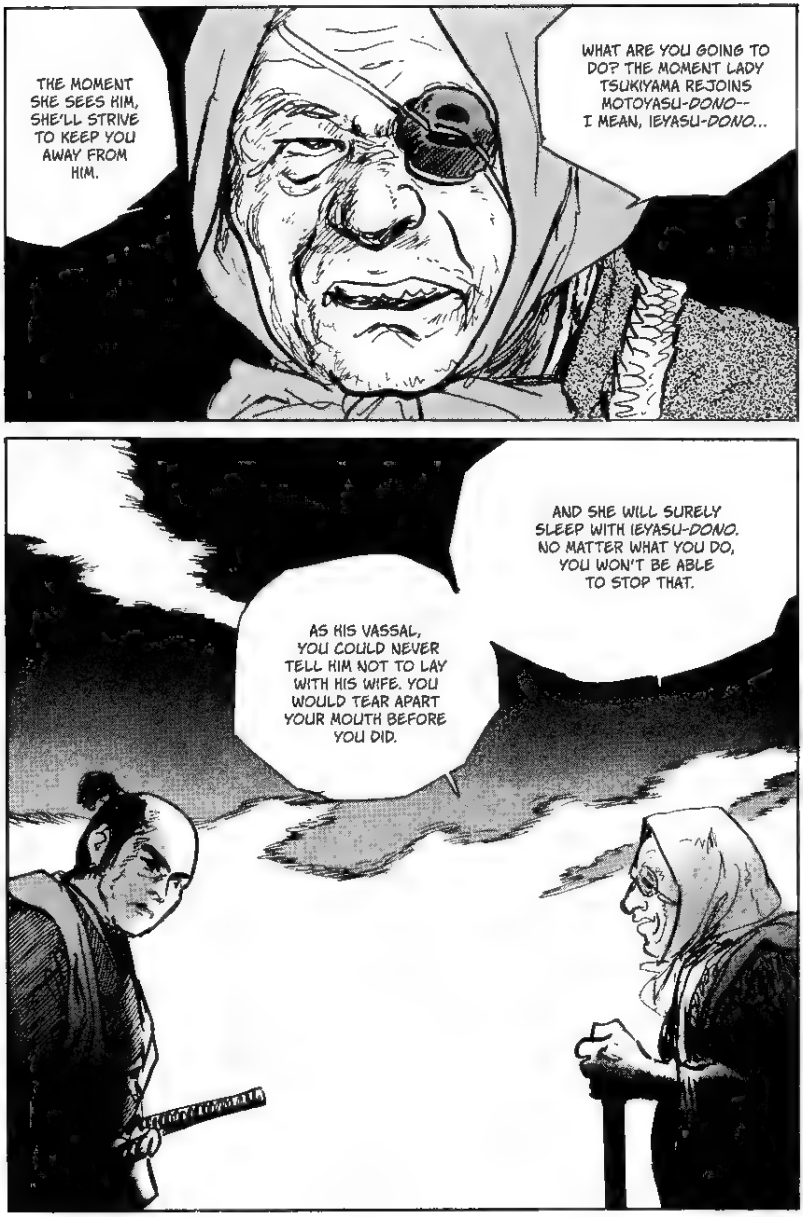
SO THAT'S HOW....
IT WAS MASANARI WHO SAVED US...

AND I... I TRIED TO KILL HIM....
SUCH A GREAT MAN... A MAN WHO WILL BE HELPING TAKECHIYO IN THE FUTURE... A MAN WHOM WE CANNOT DO WITHOUT...

I CAME ALONE TO SEE HOW IT WENT.
LISTEN, DON'T BE SO DEAD SERIOUS.
WHY NO HOSTAGES?
AND IT LOOKS LIKE IT WORKED OUT OKAY.
BESIDES, TAKEDA WON'T TRY SOME STOP-GAP MEASURE LIKE TAKING HOSTAGES.
WHAT DO YOU THINK WOULD HAPPEN IF WE DID? IMAGAWA WOULD BECOME NERVOUS, RIGHT?

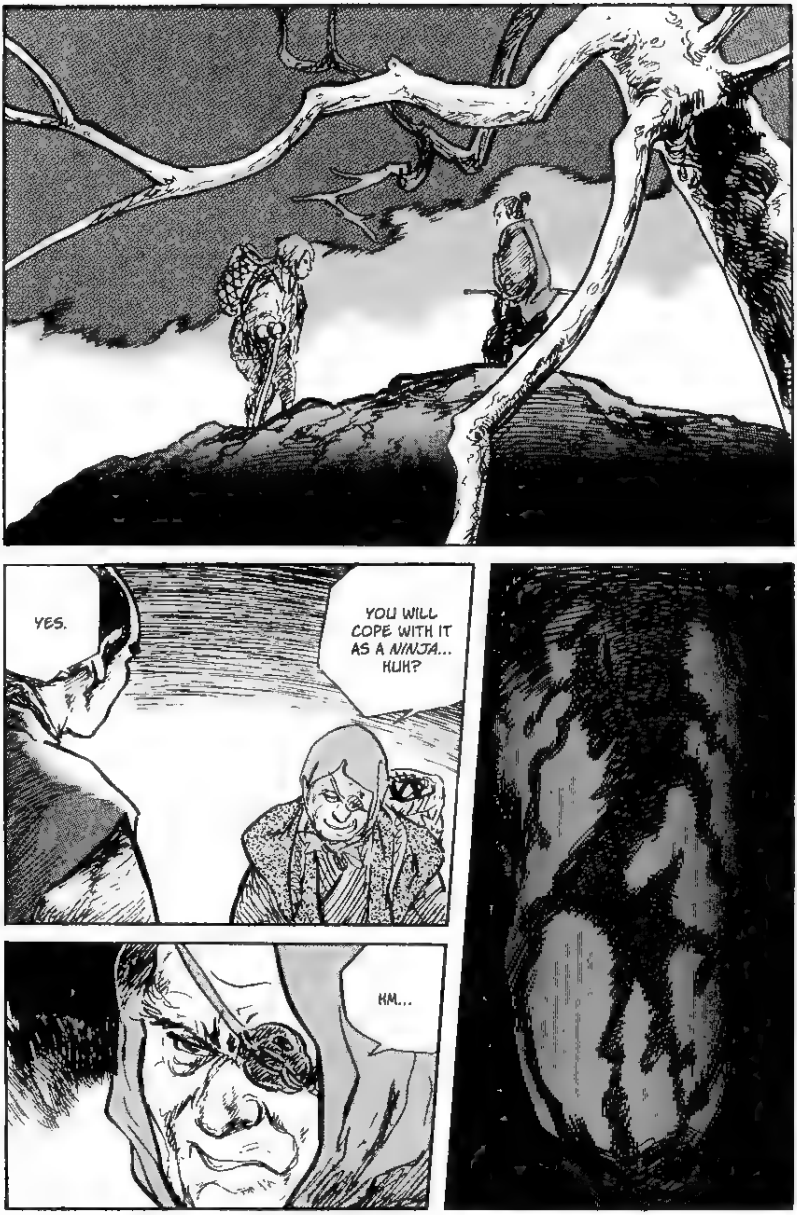
YOSHIMOTO MIGHT BE GONE, BUT IMAGAWA IS STILL POWERFUL. IT'S NOT SMART TO FIGHT THEM HEAD ON.
UJIZANE COULD EASILY DRUM UP SUPPORT FOR A BATTLE, THINKING WE'D SEIZED HOSTAGES ONLY TO STORM IMAGAWA.
TELLING LIES AND INVADING SLOWLY. THAT'S WHAT OUR WAR IS.
ANYWAY, HANZŌ-*DONO*, I WAS WORRIED ABOUT YOU. THAT'S WHY I CAME.

I HAVE A FEELING YOU SAW WHAT YOU SHOULD NOT HAVE SEEN, BETWEEN LADY TSUKIYAMA AND UJIZANE.
AND THAT'S WHY TSUKIYAMA GOZEN SENT AN ASSASSIN AFTER YOU
INDEED, IT GAVE ME THE SHIVERS, YOU KNOW.
YOU SAW WHAT HAPPENED?
KANZŌ-DONO, HOW YOU DODGED WAS QUITE IMPRESSIVE.
FROM AFAR, WHERE MY VOICE WOULD NOT HAVE REACHED.


THE MOMENT SHE SEES HIM, SHE'LL STRIVE TO KEEP YOU AWAY FROM HIM.
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO? THE MOMENT LADY TSUKIYAMA REJOINS MOTOYASU-DONO-- I MEAN, IEYASU-DONO...
AND SHE WILL SURELY SLEEP WITH IEYASU-DONO. NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO, YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO STOP THAT.
AS HIS VASSAL, YOU COULD NEVER TELL HIM NOT TO LAY WITH HIS WIFE. YOU WOULD TEAR APART YOUR MOUTH BEFORE YOU DID.

SO, WHAT WILL YOU DO? TO ALLOW UJIZANE'S BLOOD TO ENTER MATSUDAIRA WOULD BE A BIG PROBLEM, WOULDN'T IT?

I WILL ENDURE, IN NINJA'S GARB.


YES.
YOU WILL COPE WITH IT AS A NINJA... HUH?
HM...

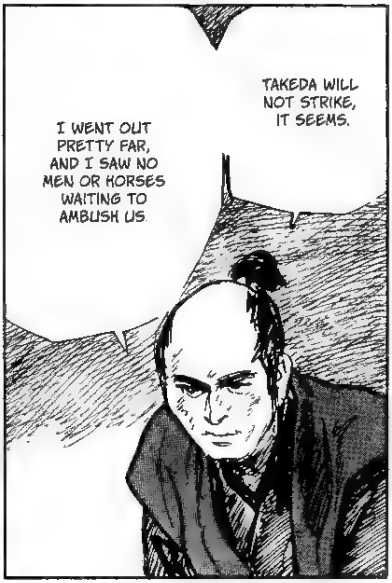
KMPH!
FROM HERE, AND IMMEDIATELY.
WITH THIS INJURY AS MY EXCUSE, I WILL LEAVE MY MASTER'S SIDE.
AND I HOPE SHE WILL REMEMBER THE PROMISE SHE MADE WITH ME, AND AVOID SLEEPING WITH MILORD FOR TEN MONTHS.
IF I DO NOT RETURN TO OKAZAKI, I THINK MILADY WILL FIND PEACE WITHIN HERSELF.
BY BREAKING MY VOICE.
IF I DON'T FEEL SHE'S COMMITTED, I WILL ASSUME ANOTHER PIECE OF NINJA'S GARB.
WILL SHE, THOUGH?

WHAT WILL YOU DO?
MY BODY BELONGS TO MY MASTER AND TO TAKECHIYO-GIMI. IF MILADY WISHES TO TAKE AWAY EVEN THAT...
YOU'VE GOT HANDS TO WRITE.
YOU'VE SPOKEN WELL.
BEING A NINJA MEANS TO ENDURE BY HOLDING A BLADE IN ONE'S HEART.
THEN I'M AFRAID I'LL HAVE TO TAKE HER LIFE.
WHY DON'T YOU COME VISIT TAKEDA WITH TSUKUMO SOMETIME-- WHILE YOU'RE STILL WEARING SUCH PROOF OF YOUR STRENGTH.
IF SHE CANNOT SEE THE DEGREE OF YOUR COMMITMENT, SHE IS NO MASTER OF YOURS. SHE HAS NO RIGHT TO BE TAKECHIYO'S MOTHER, EITHER.

YOU NEED TO KNOW THE POSITION OF YOUR STATE BY SEEING THE TRENDS OF THE NATION. YOU CAN'T FIGHT A WAR WITHOUT IT.
EYES THAT SEE ONLY ONE STATE CAN SEE ONLY ONE STATE, AND ARE INFERIOR TO THOSE WHO CAN SEE TWO.
...
...
EVENTUALLY, THIS ENTIRE COUNTRY WILL BE RULED BY A WARLORD OF OUR TIME. THE PROBLEMS WILL COME AFTERWARD.
I CAN SEE WHAT'S GOING ON WITHIN OUR NATION VERY WELL. BUT I CAN'T SEE WHAT LIES BEYOND THE SEA.
I'M ONLY ADVISING YOU TO LEARN ABOUT TAKEDA AND ODA FIRST.
BUT I'M NOT SUGGESTING YOU SHOULD FOCUS YOUR ATTENTION ON WHATEVER LIES BEYOND THE SEA.
I AM ALREADY WORRIED ABOUT IT.

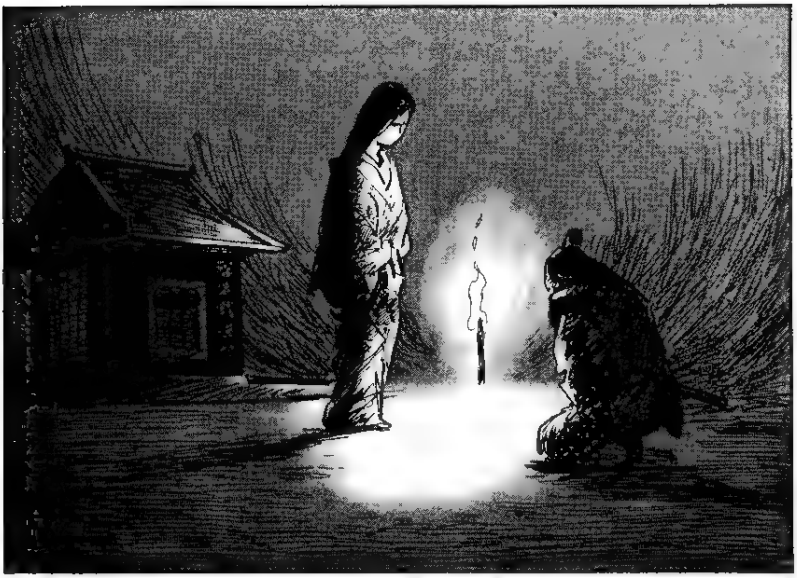
I HEAR THAT OYAKATASAMA OF TAKEDA IS FORMIDABLE.
INSTEAD I'D LIKE TO SEE YOU AGGRESSIVELY SEEK AND SEIZE AN OPPORTUNITY LIKE THIS.
IF YOU'RE HESITATING JUST BECAUSE IT'S AN INVITATION FROM YOUR ENEMY, YOU'RE SHUTTING YOURSELF IN A GOURD, LIMITING YOURSELF.
THAT'S A SCARY THOUGHT.
I MIGHT EVEN LET YOU STEP ON THE TIGER'S TAIL.
HE'S A TIGER HEH HEH HEH.
YES, SIR
I'LL BE WAITING FOR YOU.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TROUBLES.
SO PLEASE REST ASSURED.


I WENT OUT PRETTY FAR, AND I SAW NO MEN OR HORSES WAITING TO AMBUSH US
TAKEDA WILL NOT STRIKE, IT SEEMS.

NOTHING SERIOUS.
OH! YOU'RE INJURED!

SHRP
ビビ
SHRP
MILADY, MAY I HAVE YOUR AUDIENCE IN PRIVATE?



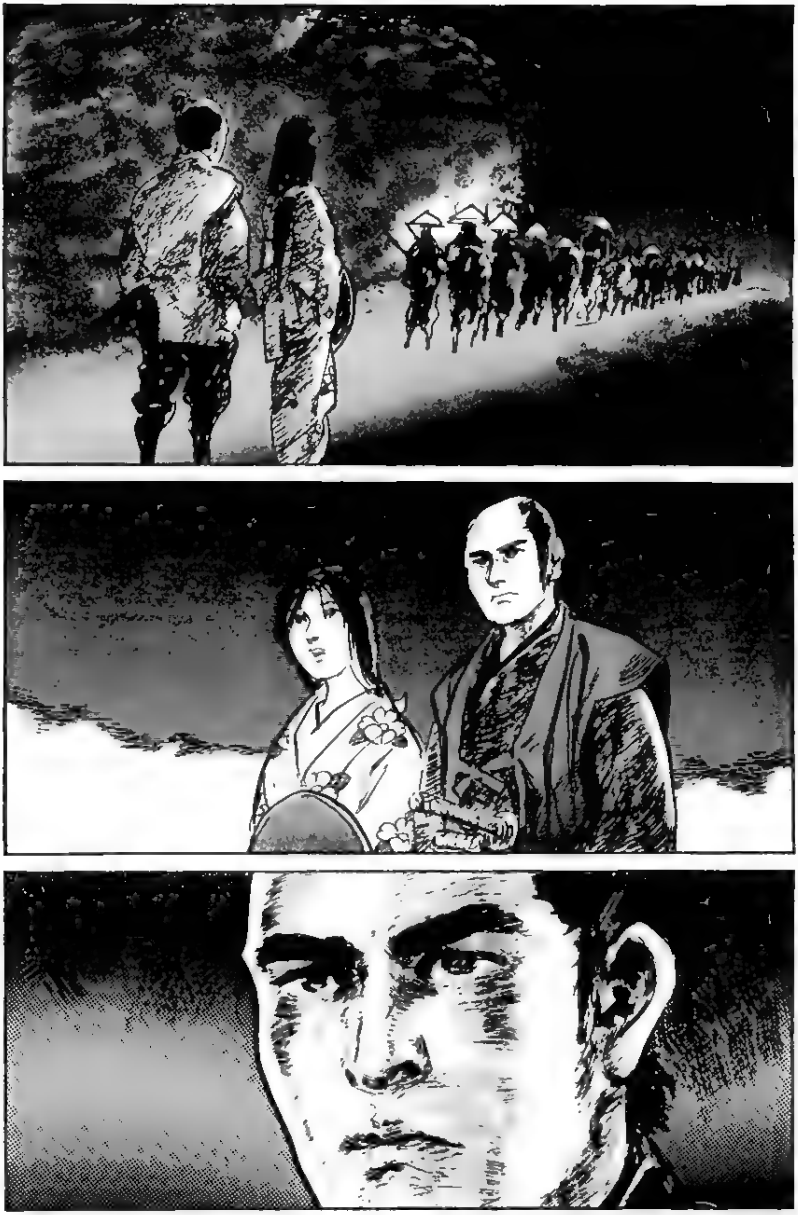
IT IS HARD NOT TO BE ABLE TO SEE MY LORD FOR SO LONG.
WITH THIS WOUND, I'M AFRAID I SHALL NOT BE ABLE TO SERVE YOU FOR TEN MONTHS.

UR...
IT MUST BE HARD FOR YOU, TOO, MILADY, TO DENY MILORD FOR TEN MONTHS.

ARE YOU SAYING THAT YOU'LL EVEN CUT OUT YOUR MOUTH IF I DO NOT AGREE?
UR...
MASANARI, DID YOU WOUND YOURSELF?
ARE YOU SHOWING ME HOW FAR YOU'RE PREPARED TO GO, IN YOUR RESOLVE NOT TO SPEAK OF WHAT HAPPENED?

FINE. THAT'S ENOUGH. I WILL SUFFER AN ILLNESS. FOR TEN MONTHS.
I SHALL LEAVE FOR IGA FROM HERE. FAREWELL, MILADY.
I WILL LET OUR LORD KNOW THAT YOU WERE BADLY INJURED ON MY BEHALF, AND TAKECHIYO'S, AND THAT I GRANTED YOU PERMISSION TO RECUPERATE IN IGA.

BUT REMEMBER THIS, MASANARI.
EVEN IF YOU DIDN'T GO THAT FAR, I MEANT TO FALL ILL.
EVEN THOUGH MY HEART SAYS YOU ARE A DEPENDABLE AND REMARKABLE VASSAL, I CANNOT FEEL THAT WAY.
BECAUSE YOU'VE SEEN MY MOST INTIMATE AFFAIRS, MY NATURE AS A WOMAN MAKES ME AFRAID OF YOU. IT GIVES ME GOOSE BUMPS. WOMEN ARE LIKE THAT. AND IT WILL PROBABLY REMAIN THAT WAY FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE... THUS, LET ME APOLOGIZE NOW FROM MY HEART.
PLEASE FORGIVE ME.



# GLOSSARY

**bugyo**
A high-ranking samurai official. A commissioner.

**enō**
Consists of kanji characters *"en (saru)"* + "ō *(okina)"* – monkey + old man. Please note, the word *okina* has an underlying nuance of respect for the old man.

**Hachiman**
The Shinto god of war.

**Haguro**
One of the mountains located in the Yamagata prefecture (formerly, Dewa province). It is one of the three mountains of Dewa Sanzan, which boasts a long history of devoted *shugenja*.

**haori**
A traditional Japanese half-coat.

**hazama**
Narrow space.

**honorifics**
Japan is a class and status society, and proper forms of address are critical. Common markers of respect are the prefixes *o* and *go*, and a wide range of suffixes. Some of the suffixes you will encounter in *Path of the Assassin*:
*chan* – for children, young women, and close friends
*dono* – archaic; used for higher-ranked or highly respected figures
*san* – the most common, used among equals or near-equals
*sama* – used for superiors
*sensei* – used for teachers, masters, respected entertainers, and politicians.

**ie**
"House" or "home."

**li**
An old Japanese unit of distance; one *li* is about 3.927 kilometers, which is about 2.44 miles.

**ikko-ikki**
The Japanese *ikko ikki*, literally "single-minded leagues," were mobs of peasant farmers and low-status samurai, who rose up against samurai rule in the fifteenth and sixthenth centuries. They followed the beliefs of the Jōdo Shinshū Buddhism, which taught that all believers are equally saved by Amida Buddha's grace.

**Ikkōshū**
Another name for Jōdo Shinshū.

**kabuto**
A traditional samurai helmet.

**Kame-hime-*sama***
Princess Kame.

**Kazumasa, Ishikawa (1534-1609)**
A very notable retainer under Tokugawa Ieyasu, even serving him since his childhood, since they were both hostages under the Imagawa at that time. After the year of 1560, when Ieyasu abandoned himself from the Imagawa, Kazumasa then became a very valued retainer and administrator under him. During the year of 1562, when Ieyasu managed to convince Imagawa Ujizane to release his family, Kazumasa acted as the guardian of the Imagawa, which at the time was a very dangerous task.

**kemari**
Kemari is a so-called sport that was popular in Japan and China in the Heian period. The object of *kemari* is to keep a small, deerskin ball in the air, with all players cooperating to do so.

**Kippōshi**
Oda Nobunaga's first given name (i.e., his infant/childhood name) before he changed his name to Nobunaga.

**kunoichi**
A term for female ninja.

**marohoshi**
A specific kind of jitte (truncheon-like weapon carried by Edo-era law enforcement officers).

**Matsukuragō no tachi**
Sword/*katana* of Masukuragō.

**Meiryō Kōhan**
A forty-volume collection of anecdotes written by Zōyo Sanada, a Shingon Buddhist priest, that recorded the words and deeds of samurai warriors from 1596 through 1715.

**mitsumono**
A system of three types of warriors who specialized in information gathering established by Takeda Shingen.

**Mizuno, Tadamasa**
The son of Mizuno Kiyotada. His daughter became Matsudaira Hirotada's wife, which made Tadamasa a grandfather to Tokugawa Ieyasu.

**Ōsamonji**
A renowned swordsmith.

**rappa**
Another name for *mitsumono*—which is basically another name for ninja.

**ryu/ryuha**
*Ryuha* may be translated to "schools" or "styles" or "traditions." Elongated form of "*ryu*."

**sageo**
"Sword knot" or "sword string."

**senban**
*Senban shuriken* were originally carpentry tools and as such did not generally look like what is usually conceived of as the ninja star. Typically they have a hole in the center, are only sharpened on the very tips, and are very nearly square in shape with slightly curved sides and a fairly thin blade.

**shinobi-bumi**
"Stealth message" or "ninja message." "*Shinobi*" is another word that refers to ninja, and "*bumi*" means "letter."

**Shinshū monto**
Followers of Jōdo Shinshū, "True Pure Land School," also known as Shin Buddhism, a branch of Pure Land Buddhism which was founded in Japan by the monk Shinran.

**Shugendo**
An old Japanese way of studying the relationship between man and nature. "Shugendo" literally means "the path of training and testing."

**shugenja**
The seventh century practitioners of the Japanese religion of Shugendo. They were sometimes known as *yamabushi*, variously rendered as "mountain warriors," "mountain hermits," "warrior priests," "bandit monks," etc.

**Takechiyo-*gimi***
Prince Takechiyo.

**Togakushi**
A village in Nagano.

**Tsukiyama-*sama***
Lady Tsukiyama.

**Ujizane (1538-1614)**
Son of Yoshimoto Imagawa. After Yoshimoto's death he was attacked by Shingen and Ieyasu. Ujizane later retaliated at the Takeda army by stopping their supply of salt. This had little effect and only resulted in the downfall of the Imagawa clan. Like his father he also enjoyed playing *kemari*.

**vilamba**
Female demons that appear in the Dharani chapter, the twenty-sixth chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

**wakizashi**
A *wakizashi* (Japanese for "sidearm") is a traditional Japanese sword with a *shōtō* blade between 30 and 60 cm, with an average of 50 cm (between 12 and 24 inches), similar to but shorter than a *katana* and sometimes longer than the *kodachi*.

**yamabushi**
Japanese mountain ascetics and warriors, mostly of the Shingon sect of Buddhism. For the most part solitary, they did form loose confederations, and associations with certain temples, and also participated in battles and skirmishes alongside samurai and *sohei* on occasion.

# GOSEKI KOJIMA

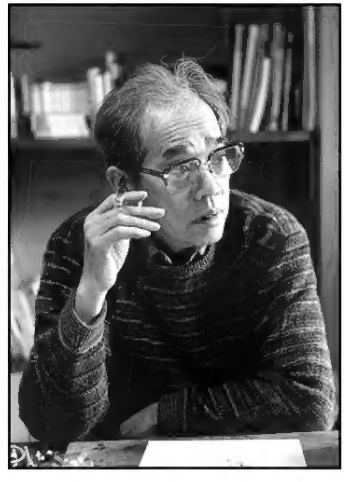
Goseki Kojima was born on November 3, 1928, the very same day as the godfather of Japanese comics, Osamu Tezuka. Art was a Kojima family tradition, his own father an amateur portrait artist and his great-great-grandfather a sculptor.

In 1950, Kojima moved to Tokyo, where the postwar devastation had given rise to special manga forms for audiences too poor to buy the new manga magazines just starting to reach the newsstands. Kojima created art for *kami-shibai*, or "paper-play" narrators, who would use manga story sheets to present narrated street plays, and later moved on to creating works for the *kashi-bon* market, bookstores that rented out books, magazines, and manga to mostly low-income readers.

In 1967, Kojima broke into the magazine market with his ninja adventure, *Dojinki*. As the manga magazine market grew and diversified, he turned out a steady stream of popular samurai manga series.

In 1970, in collaboration with Kazuo Koike, Kojima began the work that would seal his reputation, *Kozure Okami* (*Lone Wolf and Cub*). Many additional series would follow, including *Path of the Assassin* and *Samurai Executioner.*

In his final years, Kojima turned to creating original graphic novels based on the movies of his favorite director, the great Akira Kurosawa. Kojima passed away on January 5, 2000 at the age of seventy-one.



# KAZUO KOIKE

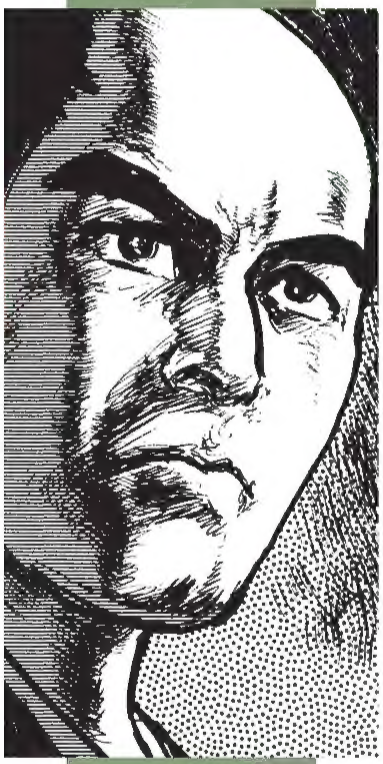
Though widely respected as a powerful writer of graphic fiction, Kazuo Koike has spent a lifetime reaching beyond the bounds of the comics medium. Aside from co-creating and writing such classic manga as *Lone Wolf and Cub* and *Crying Freeman,* Koike has hosted the popular *Shibi Golf Weekly* instructional television program; founded the *Albatross View* golf magazine; produced movies; written popular fiction, poetry, and screenplays; and mentored some of Japan's best manga talent.

Koike started the *Gekiga Sonjuku,* a college course aimed at helping talented writers and artists—such as *Ranma 1/2* creator Rumiko Takahashi—break into the comics field. His methods and teachings continue to influence new generations of manga creators, not to mention artists and writers around the world. Examples of Koike's influence range from the comics works of Frank Miller and Stan Sakai to the films of Quentin Tarantino.

The driving focus of Koike's narrative is character development, and his commitment to the character is clear: "Comics are carried by characters. If a character is well-created, the comic becomes a hit." Kazuo Koike's continued success in comics and literature has proven this philosophy true.

Kazuo Koike continues to work in the entertainment media to this very day, consistently diversifying his work and forging new paths across the rough roads of Edo-period history and the green swaths of today's golfing world.

War! Ninjas! Love! Political Intrigue! It's all packed into *Path of the Assassin*. Drafted by classic samurai manga creators Kazuo Koike and Goseki Kojima of *Lone Wolf and Cub* fame, *Path of the Assassin* is the story of a young shogun on his way to unite Japan, and the trusty ninja assigned to protect him. Be it in crafty maneuverings of war, political push and pull, or bedroom adventures, young Hattori Hanzo will not be kept from his duties.



Published in the popular pocket-sized manga format, *Path of the Assassin* packs historical fiction and fine art into yet another classic samurai series from Dark Horse.

*Lifelong Friends, with the Same Dreams, Striving to Grow into a Rising River.*

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